

Halo: Rise of the Jedi

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Summary: A HaloSW crossover & sequel to 'Halo: The Shroud of the Dark Side'. Back to the main storyline. The 501st Legion pits itself against the 205th Marines in the Battle of Felucia.

1. Chapter 1

Chapter 1

HALO: RISE OF THE JEDI****

****It has been an eventful year for the_ UNSC _and the galaxy as a whole. The Empire has been defeated again, and the Imperial Navy, the epitome of fear for lovers of freedom, has been crippled. But the war is far from over; the Empire is regrouping and preparing for another fight and the_ EMPEROR PALPATINE _is sending more bounty hunters to find and kill all the new Force users in the New Republic and prevent the rise of the_ JEDI. _****

****Far, far away, a_ UNSC _stealth ship stumbles on an interesting findâ€|****

0000 hrs****

UNSC Stealth Ship "Applebee"****

Kamino****

There was a momentary flash of bright white light as the Prowler exited the non-Einsteinian, non-Euclidean realm of SlipSpace. The man sitting inside, Lt. Joseph Walker, unbuckled his harness and floated in zero-G to the side windows to peer at the planet he had arrived at.

The planet, according to New Republic intel, was called 'Kamino'. The inhabitants were apparently very thin, very tall, very gracefulâ€|and responsible for creating and maintaining the Empire's clone army. The

rains, according to Walker's computer, would make Earth's monsoons look like drizzles. There was no land to be seen, but the Kaminoans lived in cities above the monstrous waves. These cities consisted of multiple platforms and buildings set upon highly strengthened pillars that could withstand the pounding from the ocean.

Walker frowned. There was no way that drop pods could be used here, unless AlCom wanted the ODSs to explore the sea bed. They had to send in the Marine Assault Landers. It would be a definite pain in the ass-anti aircraft fire would definitely take out many of the MALs-but there was no other choice. One thing working in the Allies' favor was that only twenty Star Destroyers were guarding the planet, something Walker considered odd for a planet responsible for creating three-quarters of the Imperial Grand Army. Maybe the Imperials thought that the Allies wouldn't travel so far.

An alarm beeped for Walker's attention; a TIE scout was approaching, and he had to get his ass out of there fast. He strapped himself in and engaged the maneuvering thrusters. The small puffs of energy would be sufficient enough to move him out of sensor range of the scout ship. Soon, the scout passed, not noticing the piece of shadow a football field's length away.

Once the TIE was a safe distance away, Walker busied himself flying the Prowler as far away from Kamino as he could. Five hours later, Walker engaged the Shaw-Fujikawa Mark-V engines and the Prowler jumped into Slipspace.

**2000 hrs**

_**UNSC Super Star Destroyer/Mobile Command Base "Preston Cole"**-

**Edge of Imperial Space**

The Super Star Destroyer dwarfed all the other ships in the United Nations Expeditionary Fleet. Formerly called the _Lusyanka_, the ship was captured during the Battle for Earth and rechristened _Preston Cole._ Modifications to her underbelly and the presence of two thousand Covenant Engineers meant that the ship could service and repair twelve Zanzibar-Class Destroyers at the same time within five hours. While the turbolasers were powerful weapons, projectile weapons were also powerful, as the Imperials had painfully found out. Therefore, six Plasma MAC turrets were added on, three to each side. Although the Imperials didn't consider one-man fighters any risk, the UNSC had a different idea; twelve hundred 50mm MLA auto cannons were added to the _Cole's_ already intimidating armament. Five thousand slots on the underside of the ship were for the Orbital Drop Shock Troopers' Hot Entry Vehicles, or HEVs. At any one time, twenty squadrons of Lance Short range fighters would fly cover over the immense vessel.

But none of these things were at the fore of Fleet Admiral Hood's mind as he anxiously waited for the _Applebee_ to return. The information Walker would come back with could tell the difference between a stunning victory and a humiliating defeat, regardless of the strength of his flagship. Then a crewman whispered something in his ear, something he wanted to hear very much. Hood went to his office to meet with Lt. Walker.

**2030 hrs**

Hood was waiting patiently in his office when the door opened, revealing a very exhausted Walker. "Please sit down Lieutenant, and feel free to speak candidly."

"Yes, sir, thank you sir," panted the ONI agent. "Maybe we should add scooters or some trams in this place. Took me half an hour to get here."

Hood chuckled. "I know what you mean. Why don't you give me your report?"

"I exited Slipspace at exactly 0000 hrs. Kamino is exactly as New Republic Intel described to us, except for one thing."

"Oh? And what may that be?"

Walker could barely suppress his glee. "The supposedly two hundred-strong Imperial fleet guarding it is currently at a tenth of its strength: only twenty ships."

Hood was astonished. "Twenty ships? That's all? The Imperials probably think we aren't gonna go on the offensive." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Maybe it's a trap. Maybe they're trying to give us a false sense of security. If that's the case, I'm giving the order for the entire expedition to mobilize."

Walker was astonished. The expeditionary forces consisted of twenty New Republic capital ships, two hundred UNSC ships, and two hundred and eighty Covenant ships, a total of five hundred ships. "Wouldn't it be a waste for all the ships to attack twenty enemy ships?"

"It may seem so, but I'm not taking any chances. The Imperials tried something like this on the New Republic at a place called Endor and nearly destroyed them. If there's a trap, we have the strength to beat it off, and if there is no trap, the Imperials will be completely overwhelmed. It's a win-win situation."

Walker considered it, and nodded. "It's better than my Athens mission, anyway."

**0500 hrs**

The arrangements had been made, the Expeditionary Fleet mobilized, all prayers said and everything polished to a squeaky clean shine. Because of their ability to travel through Slipspace (or hyperspace) the X-Wing squadrons were to be the fighter escort during the jump. The New Republic Star Cruiser _Home One_, commanded by Admiral Ackbar, was to be the ship leading the attack while the _Preston Cole_ would be safely guarded by two dozen UNSC destroyers. The Republic ships would be in the front, the Covenant ships second, and UNSC vessels right behind them. The main Covenant force, consisting of four hundred and twenty ships and commanded by the Arbiter himself, would be waiting at Chiron TL34, ready to give backup at a moments notice. Improved communications (mostly from pilfered Forerunner artifacts) meant that messages would travel much faster.

For Hood, the entire thing went by so fast and so smoothly he hardly

had time to admire the efficiency of the men, women and aliens under his command. The mission was perfect: the Fleet was prepared, the ground troops were prepared, and thanks to the Delta Squad commandos, they had valuable and useful intel on the Kaminoan cloning facilities. He had a mind to take those technologies; they would help in creating the Spartan-IVs.

A red holographic figure appeared on the holotank at Hood's elbow. "The fleet is ready to depart, sir."

"Start the countdown timers, Durandal. All ships will jump at the same time." As the entire fleet began to move, the _Cole's _deck shuddered slightly and the ship, along with the rest of the fleet, vanished.

**0600 hrs**

**Imperial Star Destroyer "Guardian"**

**Kamino**

Lt. Commander Dann Needa stood at parade rest at the bridge of his Guardian-class ship. She really wasn't a Star Destroyer at all; she was a frigate, one of twenty responsible for patrolling the watery planet 'below' the ship. He was nervous; Guardian-class frigates sported only two Turbolaser cannons, not at all sufficient to deal with the Mon Calamari Star Cruisers. He had no idea what to expect from the UNSC and the Covenant; he had been posted here since the war began and had never seen them before. Still, it was enough to keep away drug lords and crime bosses that wanted a clone army of their own. The Kaminoans were very susceptible to money and tempting offers, and Needa didn't doubt for an instance that they would gladly spike the cloning vats in exchange for their freedom. Little did he know that his fears would soon be realized and made even worse by the arrival of an enemy fleet.

Down below, in the capital of Tipoca City, a Kaminoan was giving life to some of Needa's fears. Taun We strode gracefully down the hall to the cloning facility. She walked to an elevator which went down several levels, one of many hundreds of concealed elevators. The giant facility she entered was another cloning facility. Here still were bred hundreds of thousands of Jango Fett clones, ready to battle at a moments notice. She stood at the platform overlooking the muster bay, standing with an old, ailing Prime Minister Lama Su.

Su looked at his assistant. "Give the command."

Taun We understood. She pressed a button.

All over Kamino, clones in well hidden facilities and even some in monitored facilities heard a song, a song that would wake up a sleeping rebel in each of them.

Bal kote, darasuum kote,
>Jorso'ran kando a tome
Sa kyr'am nau tracyn kad, vode an

And glory, eternal glory
>We shall bear its weight together
Forged like the saber in the
fires of death, brothers all

Non-clone Imperial officers and those clones that were untampered with heard the Mando'a song, but didn't know what to make of it. But the Fett clones knew what it was: a battle song, and a signal.

The Clone Rebellion had begun.

****A/N:** I know this chapter is a bit rushed, but I don't have enough time to add in the details that I would have liked.**

2. Chapter 2: First Strike

Chapter 2

****0712 hrs****

****Tipoca City****

****Kamino****

Clone Rebel CR-245 'Sarge' was a born leader. Literally. He had been chosen from birth to be a clone Sergeant and he knew exactly how to lead the clones under his command. They were bred to be fighters. But the problem was that the other side was bred to be fighters, too. To counter, the rebels had come up with better weapons.

Sarge hoisted the chaingun onto his shoulders, jumped out into the doorway and mowed down an entire squad of stormtroopers. He was forced to duck as a volley of red shots whizzed passed his head. Two troopers behind him tossed thermal detonators and cleared the way. Finally they were out in the rain.

Sarge had orders to secure one of the landing pads so that reinforcements could drop in. He intended to carry out those orders to the letter. The narrow path made it difficult for his squad to make it to the pad and what made it worse was the presence of snipers up in the highest pad all the way to the left of the cloning facilities. They managed to pick off three of his men and the fierce resistance they met on the pad they were meant to capture left only five clones alive with him.

The rebel clone trooper armor was highly colored so as to denote rank and file. It was useful to identify superiors and friendlies. But most important was the fact that at least they wouldn't be mistaken for stormtroopers by whoever it was who helped them.

The rain made it tough for both sides as the water messed up their visors' view. It was no surprise that many of them had discarded their helmets. But then they lost the benefit of thermal imaging, and they were forced to find each other and identify each other by where the blasters fired from and what color the bolts were. In short, it was a completely confusing battle. Sarge had absolutely no idea what the backup would be like-every available clone rebel was out fighting-but, as he watched a group of stormtroopers thunder up the causeway that linked their two platforms together, he decided it wouldn't really matter as long as they got there ****real **soon**.

It seemed that his wish was about to be granted when he turned and saw a strange, olive-green transport materialize out of the sheets of rain, whip around and disgorge twenty dark figures. Their armor was

black and so was their helmets, save for the silver visor. They paid no attention to Sarge or his clones, but fired directly on the stormtroopers as soon as they landed. Sarge had always considered slugthrowers to be obsolete, but he changed his mind as stormtroopers fell like flies under the barrage of brass. The dropship lurched into the air and faced the enemy. A chingun focused on the Imperials and roared as it fired, pounding the enemy into a puddle of gore. Then it lifted off. High above, Sarge could see the dim outlines of angular ships about six times the size of an LAAT ATTE transport. One of the newcomers approached him and removed his helmet. The man was young and had an exuberant look in his eyes, as if he enjoyed nothing more than shooting stormtroopers. It was a feeling Sarge knew well. The man spoke to him in a deep voice.

"Good to see you. I'm Master Sergeant Earnshaw," he said.

"I'm CR-245. My call sign is 'Sarge'."

Earnshaw chuckled. "I'm not even going to ask your rank, then. You need help?"

Sarge looked around at his four remaining clones. "We'd love help."

"You'd better come with us, then. Our objective is to secure two Acclamator-class frigates hidden within the city."

Sarge raised an eyebrow. "You think we can do that with twenty-five men?"

Earnshaw shrugged. "We're ODST Marines. The best that you've ever seen. That enough?"

Sarge gave a non-committal jerk of the head. "I guess so." He turned to the clones. "Load up, troopers. We've got work to do."

**0730 hrs**

**Imperial Star Destroyer "Guardian"**

Lieutenant Commander Dann Needa grabbed a console for support as a volley of Archer missiles slammed into the _Guardian's _shield. "Status Report!" he barked.

"Minimal damage, sir," came the reply. "All systems operational."

Needa looked at a Covenant frigate that was bearing down at him. "Boost power to the starboard turret and fire on that frigate."

A bright green beam of energy lanced forward and burned out the frigate's shields. Still, the enemy craft accelerated recklessly. Apparently, the Elite commander had a death wish.

"Boost power to port turret and fire," said Needa. The second turret fired, and the frigate vanished in a blue fireball. The crew cheered. Needa himself was happy. This was his first Covenant kill; all the others were UNSC fighters. But something else came to mind. "What is our fleet status?"

The man at ops didn't hesitate to give the bad news. "We're the only ship left."

"Cut a path through the enemy fighters and set a course for Coruscant."

"Yes, sir."

The _Guardian _launched a salvo of proton torpedoes, blowing three Longsword squadrons out of the way and clearing a path for the ship to escape. Before the Allies could vector in a heavy, the _Guardian _engaged her hyperspace engines and escaped.

**0900 hrs**

_**UNSC Super Star Destroyer/Mobile Command Base "Preston Cole"**-

The battle had gone very well. Not only did the Allies suffer minimal losses, the Kaminoan cloning facilities were in their hands. To add to the Allied triumph, the Kaminoans were more than willing to supply the New Republic with fresh clones. Nearly fifteen Acclamator-class frigates had been captured and added to the ever growing Fleet. Yet there was one snag; one enemy ship had managed to escape. Fleet Admiral Hood felt bothered by this fact. If the ship managed to get back to enemy space, the element of surprise would vanish. There would be no more victories like Kamino. Still, Hood doubted that the Imperials would be able to gather their forces in time for his next assault. The door of his office opened and an Elite in spotless gold armor walked in. Hood turned around and smiled. "Fleet Master Muki 'Satumee. Do sit down."

The Elite graciously denied. "What would you have me do, Admiral?"

Hood called up a star chart on the screen behind him. He pointed to a planet, which magnified and showed a world that was entirely desert, orbiting around two suns and having a sparse population. "This is Tatooine. Although it is not of strategic importance, it does have a modest monetary income, as well as having the reputation of being the 'most wretched hive of scum and villainy', as our New Republic friends say. There is a small Imperial garrison there, but they shouldn't pose too much of a problem if they are dealt with quickly. The greater danger comes from the crime bosses and gangs that control most of the planet. This is where the Imps hire all their bounty hunters." Hood turned to face 'Satumee. "I want that planet under Allied control within seventy-two hours."

"It will be done."

"Good. You'll be in command of a Covenant cruiser, a Covenant frigate and a UNSC Halcyon-class cruiser. You're dismissed, Fleet Master. Good Luck." 'Satumee bowed and left the room. Seconds later, Luke Skywalker burst in. Hood turned to look at him, one eyebrow raised. "Something wrong, general?"

"I'd like permission to go to Yavin-4."

"Why?"

"I have to return to the Jedi Academy to train my students." Here, Skywalker smiled. "With your permission, I'd like to train Lieutenant Sanders."

Hood's eyes widened. "He has the skill to become a Jedi? But he's a valuable asset. That mission he did with Walker in Athens—he'll be useful against the Imperials."

"He would be more than useful to you if you let me train him," pleaded Skywalker.

Hood was silent for the longest time. "Your request is accepted, general." Before Skywalker left, Hood muttered, "May the Force be with you."

The Jedi laughed and went his way.

**1400 hrs**

**Covenant Cruiser "Restored Honor"**

**300 meters above Mos Eisley**

**Tatooine**

Gan 'Ortolee grimaced as the gravity lift dumped him and his team into the center of the desert city. The hot, dry climate was no comfort to the Elite; he had been raised on a planet where there was plenty of places to swim. It was worse, however, for the Grunts. They were used to subzero temperatures and this planet was like hell to them.

The locals who crowded around them were a mix of species. 'Ortolee could see humans, but he didn't recognize the rest. As they got closer, the Elite took his plasma rifle out of its holster. It didn't hurt to be too careful.

The Elite's caution seemed justified when a fishlike biped approached him. The Rodian walked with a casual swagger and lightly drummed on his blaster. Surprisingly, the creature spoke passable Basic.

"Going somewhere, ugly?" sneered the Rodian. Several people in the crowd laughed.

For answer, 'Ortolee powered up his rifle. It hummed with energy.

"Oooh, now I'm scared," said the Rodian. He drew his own pistol blindingly fast and fired a well aimed shot right in the center of the Elite's forehead. He was dumbfounded when the shot dissipated against the silver shields.

"I'm not good with words," said 'Ortolee, "But I'm an expert when it comes to force." He brought his rifle down on the Rodian's head and watched with satisfaction as the limp body fell to the ground.

A one-eyed creature, an Abyssin, came forward, and 'Ortolee vowed he'd never call a human 'ugly' ever again. "Do you know who you just killed?" roared the Abyssin.

"Should it interest me?" asked the Elite, apparently finding the polished sheen of his plasma rifle more important.

"That was one of Gardulla's men. He'll see you all dead before the suns set!"

'Ortolee ignored him and called in for reinforcements. Many people were drawing away in fear, but some, including a few disheveled humans, were drawing their weapons. Without warning, they attacked. Two Grunts were shot, but the other two blew the Abyssin apart with their needlers. 'Ortolee fired on full auto, killing four, but his shield was dropping and there was no cover to be found. The plasma vents on his weapon opened as the rifle dumped excess heat, and 'Ortolee knew he wouldn't last long. Suddenly, a Phantom dropship appeared. The plasma cannons strafed the ground, killing all of the attackers and dropped off a squad of human Marines. One of them was the well-known Sergeant Johnson. He looked approvingly at the carnage.

"Looks like you've been having some fun. Mind if I join the tea party?"

****A/N: This will probably be the last chapter you'll see for a long time. You might see something in one or two months. The Final Exam is a bitch.****

3. Chapter 3: Golden Oldies

Chapter 3

1530 hrs****

Mos Eisley Space Port****

Tatooine****

"The best place to find out information would be the Cantina," said the man.

"Thanks," said Sgt. Johnson. "We appreciate the help."

"Be careful. People get killed in there on a daily basis."

Johnson lit his cigar. "I'll keep that in mind." He walked confidently on the road, his Marines behind him. People and aliens stared at him, but he gave no notice. He had to give the impression that he wasn't someone to be intimidated easily. When he reached to Cantina entrance, he ordered five of his Marines to stay back and act as reinforcements if necessary. He entered the stuffy cantina, shotgun at the ready. His caution was justified when an Aqualish blocked his path.

"Nice slugthrower you got there," he warbled. "How about I make you eat it?"

"How about I stuff this here shotgun up your ass? Out o' the way, four-eyes, before I blast ya' to next Sunday."

Many of the customers laughed at Johnson's comment, but the Aqualish

was beside himself with fury. He took a swing at the Marine. It would be the last move he would make.

The M90 boomed and the eight-gauge buckshot tossed the alien across the room, a trail of blood marking his trajectory. The customers gave a look at the body, before returning to their business. Johnson looked at the body. "I told ya so." He walked up to the human bartender who regarded him with a wary expression. "Sorry 'bout the mess."

The man shrugged. "It happens all the time." He continued to wipe a filthy cup.

"Can you tell me where the local Imperial barracks are?"

"I know." The answer came from a fellow who sat in a dark part of the cantina.

"Who the hell are you?" demanded the Sergeant.

"The name's Boba Fett."

__**1400 hrs**__

__**Emperor's Quarters**__

__**Coruscant**__

Admiral Daala collapsed on the floor, gasping for breath, her body wracked with pain. A cloaked man stood in front of her, gazing on her as if she was slime on his office floor.

"There," he said, "I think that is enough punishment for your blunders." He looked at his guards, men dressed in robes the color of fresh blood. "Take this wretched thing out of m sight." As the Red Robes wordlessly obeyed, Palpatine summoned his apprentice.

Darth Vader knelt before his master. "What is thy bidding, my master?"

"I see that you have failed in your mission."

Vader didn't move. "If it hadn't been for Daala's overconfidence, Earth would have been in my hands."

"I did not say it was your fault, Lord Vader. I merely wanted you to know that next time, you will be punished."

"I understand, Master." Just then, the doors opened, revealing a Lieutenant Commander in a disheveled condition. As he walked into the light, Vader could see a gash across the man's face.

"What happened to you, Needa?" inquired Palpatine.

"Kamino has been attacked and invaded!" said Needa.

"By who?" asked Vader. "The Rebellion?"

"No, Lord Vader. The Allied Navy."

Vader didn't know what to say. He had expected the Allies to fortify their border at the most. He hadn't anticipated that they would actually venture into Imperial space.

Palpatine wasn't as tongue tied as his apprentice. "How large was their fleet?"

"Probably as large as ours. We tried to defend the planet, but we never had a chance. I only just managed to escape."

"I see." He turned to Vader. "Our military will see to the defense of our empire. The Sovereign Project is due to be completed in a year's time. Until then, the Fleets will slow them down. In the meantime, we will devote our attention to other things."

Vader knew what he was talking about: the resurgent Jedi Order. "He is being reconstructed on Geonosis even as we speak. The Jedi will not be prepared for his return. They believe-as the rest of the galaxy does-that he was killed in the Clone Wars."

"Yes. They will fear the return of General Grievous."

A/N: Tiny snippet, I know, but I'm working on the next Chapter. You'll see it soon.

4. Chapter 4: Sovereign Dominance

Chapter 4

One Year Later

**1300 hrs**

**UNSC Super Star Destroyer/Mobile Allied Command Base "Preston Cole"**

**Allied Task Force "Alpha"**

**En Route to Imperial Base on Nal Hutta**

Fleet Admiral Terrance Hood stood at parade rest in the bridge. He was reasonably happy; in a year's time they had taken three star systems with little loss. Boba Fett-due to a little vendetta with the Empire-was helping the Jedi fend off mercenaries and bounty hunters. They had befriended the reborn Mandalorians and the New Republic Army was bolstered by the arrival of new clone troopers. Even more important was the arrival of the Spartan IV series.

An aging Doctor Halsey and Doctor Praveen Shankar, her successor to the SPARTAN program, had toyed around with the Kaminoan cloning technology. What they found most interesting was the growth acceleration. As a result, fifty new Spartans were now on their way to the frontlines.

Nal Hutta was an important financial center for the Imperials. Without it, they would be hard pressed to pay Kuat Drives for new ships. Hood intended to make it as hard as he could for the Imperials.

With a sudden deceleration, the task force of two hundred and fifty ships reverted to real space. Nal Hutta stood before themâ€|completely unprotected.

"What the hell?" muttered Hood. "Krishna."

"Yes sir?" replied the AI.

"Is there any Imperial ship in system?"

"None that the scopes can find, sir."

Hood rubbed his chin. "I don't like this. All ships, scan the area. I want visual confirmation that there are no ships in the area." A tense five minutes passed.

"Sir!" cried the COM officer, "_Ascendant Justice_ has detected two large masses inbound. They're bigger than any known Imperial ship model."

Hood squinted at the screens. There! There were two large black spaces where there were no stars. "Increase magnification," he barked. What he saw made his blood run cold.

They were ships, alright. But they were _huge_. Each ship was about a third again as large as the _Preston Cole_ and painted pitch black. The ships did not appear on any scope. They bristled with turbolaser batteries and anti-fighter flak. On the prow of each ship was a cone. There was no visible bridge tower. The engines emitted a dull red glow.

"New toys, huh?" muttered Hood. "Well, I'm not about to let 'em try them out. All ships, arm plasma torpedoes and MAC guns. Group A, fire on the one on port. Everyone else, fire at the other bastard on my mark." He waited for a few precious seconds, then said, "Mark!"

One hundred and twenty five ships fired at each mystery ship, and a tidal wave of smoldering metal, bright red teardrops, and thousands of missiles streaked across the blackness of space. The _Cole_ _shuddered_ as she added three Super MAC rounds to each groups' volley.

"Five seconds to salvo impact," announced Krishna.
"Fourâ€|threeâ€|twoâ€|oneâ€|salvo has reached the targets."

On screen, the mystery ships were enveloped in shining oval spheres. When the light faded away, the ships were still there.

Hood cursed. "Ready another salvo. And I mean now!" On screen, the enemy crafts' prows were glowing with a fierce green light. Seconds later, two green beams of lethal energy shot into Hood's fleet.

"Sir!" cried the NAV officer, "Twenty ships destroyed!"

Hood stared at the screen as the prows started glowing again. "Take evasive action!" He clutched the railing as the _Cole_ _lurched_ out of the second blast. The second destroyed fifteen ships. "Fire!"

The task force fired again. The salvo burned against the foremost

ship's shields, which finally winked out of existence. A handful of missiles and plasma torpedoes got through, burning the black armor slightly.

"Minimal damage to target," announced Krishna.

"Not for long," said Hood. "Fire the nuke!"

The Shiva sped towards the mystery ship and detonated. A blue ball of nuclear fire engulfed it, then cooled away. When it disappeared, the ship was still there.

"No," growled Hood.

"Enemy craft has sustained significant damage," announced Krishna. "It's moving off. So is the other."

"At least we can hurt them," said Hood. "Ready the next salvo; let's catch him while his shields are still down."

"Sir! Enemy ships are coming about!"

On screen, the enemy craft slowly turned around, the damaged one moving slower and leaving a trail of atmosphere and smoke. Their prows started glowing again.

"The fleet is ready, Admiral," said Krishna.

"Fire!"

The fleet's salvo hit the damaged ship head on, crumpling its super laser. Her foredecks burned from the impact. The second ship fired, however, a brilliant green weapon of destruction.

The _Cole_'s emergency ventral thrusters propelled the massive ship upwards out of the path of the laser. Others weren't as lucky: the beam cut through the ships that moved to cover the _Cole _like a hot knife through butter.

"Fifty ships destroyed, Admiral," said Krishna. "With all due respect, I suggest that we retreat. Not even the _Cole_'s shields can handle that much firepower."

Hood nodded. "Sound the retreat. We'll regroup at Yavin-4."

1313 hrs

_**Imperial Sovereign Class Super Star Destroyer
"Sovereign"**_

**Nal Hutta**

Major Ysanne Isard, head of Imperial Intelligence, watched as the Allies retreated. Their number was cut down by over a third, while both her ships were still intact. "Status report."

"The _Sovereign _has sustained no damage. The _Dominance _has sustained heavy damage to her bow, and the main laser array is severely damaged as well. She can still make hyperspace jumps."

"Very well. Lieutenant, tell the _Dominance _that we are heading for Kuat. Prepare for the jump." Isard walked to her office. She wasn't interested in the outcome of the battle. She hadn't become interested in anything after she lost the _Lusyanka_, her beloved ship, at the battle for Earth. While the Mon Calamari Star Cruisers bombarded the ship with ion cannons and the Covenant boarding craft swarmed towards it, she had escaped. Now, it was in the hands of the Allies, who renamed it the _Preston Cole_.

She noticed a report on an Allied spy. The Allied codename for him was 'Die Nadel'. Apparently, it meant 'The Needle' in an Earther language. She noticed that the few times he left any evidence, it was a dead Imperial officer or citizen, stabbed by a stiletto. She was impressed; this man (or woman) was like her: ruthless and efficient. This, she realized, made him more difficult to catch. He had sent several messages to his superiors, one of which they had intercepted and decoded. It read:

****PLNB _Priority _Transmission SE004T-XX****

****Encryption Code: **BETA**

****Public Key: **N/A**

****From: **CODENAME: _DIE NADEL_**

****To:**CODENAME: _EAGLE_**

****Subject: **PROGRESS REPORT/OPERATION _KASHMIR_**

****Classification: **EYES ONLY TOP SECRET (SECTION III X-RAY
DIRECTIVE)**

/file extraction-reconstitution complete/

/start file/

Imperials have completed stealth juggernaut capital ships. Be advised; ships heavily armed. Firepower equal to five large tonnage vessels. Sabotage mission has failed.

Nal Hutta identified as Imperial trap. Advise that you ****do not engage****. Stealth juggernauts await you there.

Regards to James

/end file/

/scramble-destruction process disabled/

Press ****ENTER ****to continue.

Isard had no idea who the 'Eagle' was, nor what 'Regards to James' meant. She deduced that the Needle had discovered the trap too late to do anything other than warn his fleet; the weak encryption code testified to that. Intelligence had disabled the scramble destruction process in time to retrieve the first two paragraphs, but Isard suspected that more evidence had been erased. In any case, it seemed that the Needle had learned his lesson; his messages were too

encrypted to read now.

Isard was reasonably sure that the Emperor would be delighted in the outcome of the battle. Though the Allied Fleet had been able to heavily damage the Dominance, the presence of the Sovereign was too much for them to handle. With another sister ship on its way, the Allied Fleet would be hard pressed to defend itself. Eighty five ships was an impressive tally for a new type of craft.

Based on study of Allied tactics, Isard postulated that the next target of the enemy would be the financial center of Mygeeto. She would send the Sovereign there. After the Dominance was repaired, it would be sent back to Nal Hutta. Each ship would have twenty Star Destroyers and smaller craft to back it up. In short, it would take the entire might of the Allied Navy to defeat the new ships. Even if they did, the Allies would be too heavily damaged to continue the fight.

There were rumors that the bounty hunter Boba Fett had resurrected the old Mandalorian Order, and that they were preparing to attack Imperial installations. Isard felt that that was preposterous. There was good intelligence that Boba Fett had died on Tatooine. And the notion of a Mandalorian army was equally preposterous; credible sources said that the Mandolorians had killed each other off long ago, not to mention what the Old Jedi Order had done to them.

The Covenant weren't as readily understood as the Earthers or the New Republic. The reports indicated that they were made up of several races, none of which resided in Intelligence profiles. There were several images taken during fighting on several planets. Most of them showed little meter-high creatures with a cone on their backs-Grunts in their chilled methane suits-and leaping, roaring eight feet-tall armored warriors known as Elites. Some showed large spiny creatures that fired green blobs of energy from their right arms, called Hunters. They also performed better than their allies. Their tactics could be compared to those of a vicious animal.

Isard decided to focus on the Covenant. With the alien conglomerate out of the picture, it would be easier to push back the Allies.

Isard kicked back and closed her eyes, dreaming she was back on board the Lusyanka.

1512 hrs

105th ODST "Helljumpers", E-Company

Engaging Imperial 15th Armored Division

Thyffera

"Get down!"

Twenty Helljumpers hit the ground as soon as Master Sergeant Earnshaw yelled. An HE laser bolt hit the house behind them and blew a ten foot diameter hole through the wall. A beam cannon walked its deadly beam over three Marines, cutting them in two halves. Another HE bolt struck a hedgerow, throwing the charred remains of five Marines into the air.

A Private grabbed Earnshaw by the shoulder. "Sir, we're getting massacred out here! We don't have any launchers!"

"Hold on, son," replied Earnshaw. "7th Armored is on its way. We'll have to hold out till then. Inflict casualties on their infantry support." With that, he raised himself and fired his MA5B in short quick bursts. A beam cannon gunner slumped over in his seat and five stormtroopers fell under a quick barrage of fire.

Encouraged with this success, a number of Helljumpers leaped out of their cover, BR55s blazing. The sudden counter attack neutralized ten stormtroopers and knocked a Darktrooper out of the air.

A rumble reverberated through the ground as the two TX-140 tanks spun on their axis and fired. Four columns of road pavement flew up into the air, accompanied by charred bits of flesh and body armor.

"Stay down!" yelled Earnshaw. "Stay down, godammit!" One of the tanks swiveled and focused its twin blaster cannons on him. Earnshaw waited for the inevitable shot.

****BOOM!****

"What theâ€¦" Earnshaw raised himself on his elbow. He smiled. "Hello, 7th Armored."

Five Scorpion MBTs rumbled into the street, chainguns blazing. A turret swiveled and fired, blowing the other TX-140 apart. Infantry support in the form of Republic soldiers in camo uniforms and clone troopers in white and red armor charged in, blasters blazing. A squad of clones and a Republic T2B-1 armored vehicle chased after a line of retreating stormtroopers. The Scorpions' chainguns opened up, uttering a roar that pounded Earnshaw's eardrums. Stormtroopers flailed like marionettes as they were hit by hundreds of rounds.

Within fifteen seconds, the tide of the battle had changed.

"Hold up, boys," said Earnshaw, an order that his men were only too glad to obey. They had been fighting in this town for over seven hours. Dodging from behind bacta tanks and houses, pinned down by snipers and running away from tanks, the remnants of E-Company had worn themselves out. Earnshaw had taken command when Lieutenant Khan bought the farm. Now, finally, they had a chance to rest and take a break from the non-stop fighting.

His radio crackled. _"Area secure, all hostiles have been eliminated." _

"Patch me through to the _Patriot_," said Earnshaw. "Mission accomplished, Captain Hussein. We have secured the bacta deposits."

"_Good work, E-Company." _

"What's the status of that Imperial Star Destroyer?"

"_Listing to port and smoking a bit." _

"You've been busy."

A chuckle came over the COM. _"Yes we have." _ Then the Captain's voice turned serious. _"You and your men are being transferred to the Mygeeto Theatre. You have one hour to get your outfit ready. _Patriot _out."_

Earnshaw gave the orders and pondered Hussein's last command and the tone it was delivered in. He had know the ship driver since junior high, and he had never heard him use such a serious tone. Hussein was usually a jolly person who could never pass up an opportunity for a joke.

Whatever it was, he hoped he wouldn't be paired up with a Spartan team.

5. Chapter 5: Battle for Mygeeto Part I

Chapter 5

**2100 hrs**

**UNSC Cruiser "Mobile Bay", Task Force Sierra**

**Engaging Imperial Strike Group 6**

**Mygeeto**

_Mobile Bay _shuddered as twelve concussion missiles slammed into its hull. A steady _whumph-whumph-whumph _echoed through the ship as the point defense MLA cannons opened up on TIE fighter squadrons. The ship shook even more violently as the two MAC cannons fired their tungsten shells. Even worse was the fact that Imperial boarding craft had managed to attach themselves to the ship and the _Mobile Bay_'s Marine contingent was fully involved in neutralizing the boarders.

Captain William Scott glowered as yet another UNSC tag faded off the TAC display. The Imperials had stonewalled the fifty strong Allied taskforce, and were proceeding to destroy it one by one.

Scott flinched as a TIE Interceptor passed the bridge with only meters to spare, followed by two Lance fighters. A few hundred kilometers ahead, a UNSC frigate's frame bent and warped as the ship took several direct hits from turbolaser blasts and hundreds of concussion missiles. The craft finally gave and exploded in a nuclear ball of flame. A Longsword bomber squadron dropped its payload on a Star Destroyer. As soon as the enemy ship's shields were down, a Covenant cruiser and an Acclamator-class Star Destroyer launched salvos of proton torpedoes and plasma torpedoes. The imperial ship burned and the engines died. The ship slowly fell into Mygeeto's gravity well. It was complete chaos, and Scott couldn't see how it could get any worse.

It was going to get a lot worse.

"Sir," said the NAV officer, "new contact fifteen thousand kilometers off of the battle group. Big sucker, too. Could be an Imperial reinforcement fleet."

"Signal the Covenant commander that we have unwanted visitors. All ships under his command will deal with the newcomers. Everyone else will continue focusing their attacks on these bastards."

"Yes sir."

Twelve Covenant cruisers and thirteen frigates and destroyers slowly pulled out of the battle to engage the newcomers. The engines of the alien ships flared blue as they picked up speed. Soon, they were out of sight. A radio transmission came from the Covenant commander.

"_We have reached the enemyâ€|by the gods, what is that?"_

"What is it, commander?" asked Scott.

"_It is a single ship. But it is as big as High Charity! It is painted black. Our sensors cannot read it."_

Scott frowned. If the Covenant sensors couldn't read it, why could his? The answer seemed simple: they _wanted _to be found, and _only_ by the UNSC. Suddenly, a message pinged for his attention.

"_This is Captain Hussein of the _Patriot_. This is strictly an ONI operation. Do not, repeat, do NOT engage that ship! We'll handle it, unless you like looking like Swiss cheese. Hussein out."_

Scott's expression darkened: he disliked Naval Intelligence and the way they kept him in the dark. But since Colonel Ackerson was dead, it was _possible_ that ONI was once again a little more dedicated to the defense of the UNSC. On screen, he noticed the tag of the _Patriot _accelerating towards the mystery contact. What advantage Hussein had over that behemoth, he couldn't imagine.

"Are those nuclear mines in place, Lieutenant?"

"Yes sir. I'm getting active signals from all four mines."

Scott nodded. "Detonate them. It's time we started winning."

**2104 hrs**

**UNSC Cruiser "Patriot"**

**En Route to Imperial Sovereign-Class Star Destroyer "Sovereign"**

**Mygeeto**

Captain Sharif Hussein watched as the enemy craft steadily grew larger on the screen. Behind him stood Spartan John-117 and Master Sergeant James Earnshaw.

"So," said Earnshaw, "the Spartans and my men are going to board that thing, neutralize a city's worth of crew, and take control of it, sir?"

"That's the basic idea, yeah," said Hussein. "ONI has trouble making fool-proof plans. It doesn't help that the people who make the plans

have the IQ of bird shit."

There was general laughter throughout the bridge, and even the helmet-less Spartan smiled. Hussein had that effect.

The Captain turned to the Master Chief. "Once the shields are down, you'll be on your own. You'll be doing the boarding all by your lonesome. All I can do is provide some distractions with the fighters. Got it?"

"Yes sir." The Spartan turned towards Earnshaw. "Have your men ready in Launch Bay Seven in two minutes."

"They're already on their way down there sir," replied Earnshaw. Unlike most Marine personnel, Earnshaw liked the Master Chief. Even if the Spartan was under the Naval department, he was still a ground pounder like the rest of them.

"Good work, Sergeant," said the Chief. He was impressed with Earnshaw's command. The Chief had also taken to removing his helmet whenever addressing his men before a battle, and the responses were positive. Maybe they liked realizing that there was a human underneath the armor. Now, however he fastened his helmet and jogged double time to the elevator, the Sergeant in his wake.

The launch bay was empty except for a cargo class Pelican, ten Helljumper and fourteen Spartans. Half of them were Spartan-IIs, John's remaining comrades. The others were Spartan-IVs, recently arrived from Kamino. The IVs were no different from the IIs, except for one thing: they were grown at an accelerated rate. In effect, these Spartans were only three years old.

John put his mind to the mission. It didn't really make a difference how old they were. They were all equally effective.

The heavily armored and loaded Pelican's engines made a roaring sound which was abruptly silenced by their entry into space. In front of them, implausibly large, loomed the enemy ship. John saw gun turrets swivel and fire—but not at the Pelican.

Behind the dropship, three Lance fighters erupted into balls of flame after taking direct hits. Another Lance fighter and the Longsword they had been escorting flew towards the enemy ship. The fighter peeled off to engage several TIE Interceptors, while the bomber continued on a perpendicular course to the Pelican. That was when John realized that Captain Hussein wasn't going to take down the enemy's shields.

He was simply trying to punch a hole.

An Imperial Tartan Patrol ship disengaged from the immense craft and proceeded on an intercept course—until two MAC rounds punched right through it.

Apparently, _Patriot_ was still on station.

The Longsword fired all its AGSM missiles and a Fury-tipped missile. The enemy ship's shields flared in an oblong sphere—but there was a small hole, about a hundred meters across.

The Master Chief punched the engines to the max and rocketed through the hole with inches to spare. He brought the Pelican upright so that he was flying a few meters above the hull. He flew right into the central hangar with all guns blazing. The sudden and unexpected attack blew away an Imperial dock air crew and made mincemeat of the craft still inside.

Suddenly, the Pelican jerked and bucked violently. Slowly, it was forced out of the hangar. John pushed the engines to the max, to no avail.

"Damn," said Spartan-IV Joshua-05. "They're using their tractor beam to push us out."

The starboard engine ripped away due to the conflicting forces, and the Pelican spun out of the hangar and crashed into the dorsal hull, nose in. there was a sharp pain, a flash of white, and John blacked out.

John came to a few seconds later. His vision was blurred, and he could barely make out basic shapes. He shook his head; the blurriness went. Unlinking his harness, he magnetized his boots and made his way to the cargo hold.

All fourteen Spartans were coming to, as was Sergeant Earnshaw and two or three ODSTs. The rest hung limply in their harnesses, dead.

Earnshaw surveyed the carnage. "Aw, Christ."

"Salvage as much ammo and weapons as possible," said the Master Chief, "then distribute them equally." He walked over to Earnshaw. "Your suit can stand the vacuum for a limited time: about ten minutes."

"Ten minutes!"

"Ten minutes," repeated the Chief. "By that time, we'll be inside." He turned to the Spartans. "Drake, get as much C-12 as possible and mold it so we can get in. Linda, Joshua, perimeter patrol. The rest of you back them up."

"Load up, Marines," barked Earnshaw. The ODSTs primed their rifles. Earnshaw grabbed a BR55 and a magnum pistol, plus a few grenades.

The Master Chief took an MA5B, an M90 Shotgun, and an M6D pistol, plus six frags.

"_Chief," _said Joshua, _"We've got incoming stormtroopers. Some of them are going EVA."_

John glanced outside. In the distance, he could see white armored soldiers crawling slowly towards them. Others, much closer, were wearing jet packs and flying closer.

One of them veered to the side, blood spurting in his wake. Even though he couldn't hear the S2's sound in the vacuum, he knew it was Linda.

"Alright," said the Master Chief, "They're welcome to search the Pelican. Let's go."

They moved as fast as they could, the ODSTs hanging on to the Spartans. Occasionally, Linda and Joshua would turn around, fire, and turn back.

Drake handed the detonator to John. "I've also rigged some auto guns, Chief. When they get in range, they'll think someone's still inside."

"Good work," said the Chief. Without turning around, he pressed the trigger.

A pressure wave overtook them and they turned around. There was a large crater in the durasteel hull, and pieces of stormtrooper armor floating in space. Some were still alive, arms and legs flailing in the null gravity.

Overhead, the shield flared as two MAC bolts and hundreds of missiles made contact. Apparently, the _Patriot_ was trying to draw the enemy ship away from Task Force Sierra.

John and the others double timed it to the hole. A scintillating film separated them from the inside of the ship; it was ray shielded.

"Gee," said one of the Marines, "we're screwed."

"Neil," said the Chief, "plasma grenades."

Five blue flashes went off. The film brightened for a second, then disappeared.

"Everybody in!" shouted the Master Chief. "Go go go!"

Fighting against the rush of atmosphere, the team dropped inside. The ship's corridors were the same type he had seen before in all Imperial ships. The lighting in this part was shorted out from the plasma blast.

"Cortana?" whispered the Chief.

"Nothing so far," said Cortana. "Though they could be blocking my scans."

"Stay alert, team," said John. As soon as he said that, his motion sensor flashed and ten stormtroopers rounded the corner.

The Spartans reacted faster than the troopers, cutting them down with a hail of bullets. One attempted to get up and received a bullet in the head for his trouble.

"If they didn't know we were here," said Cortana, "they know now."

That was bad. Considering a ship of this size had a crew population had a size to rival New York City, there was no way they could engage them head on. They would obviously guard the bridge with a large number of men. John had no desire to assault a heavily fortified

position held by Storm Commandos and Dark Troopers. On the other handâ€¦|

"Change of plans, team," said the Chief. "We're gonna blow this tub. Cortana, where's engineering?"

**2130 hrs**

**New Covenant Cruiser "Shining Path"**

**Mygeeto**

Fleet Master Noga Terrami watched the UNSC cruiser attack the immense Imperial ship like a stinging insect. The enemy swerved this way and that, trying to face it, but it was too slow. Idiots. Their main ship batteries would inflict major damage on the Marathon-Class cruiser, but they refused to use them. If Terrami had commanded the ship, he would have all the main cannons focus their fire on the ship, blasting it to bits. But the enemy wanted to do it by grandly blasting them with their monster weapon. Fools.

Suddenly, the top hangar bay of the Imperial ship opened and a shuttle shot out. The FOF tag marked it as a UNSC contact. Then the engine pods of the juggernaut exploded. Terrami could see the egg-shaped shields flickering and fading. The ship continued on its course, straight towards the right flank of the Imperial lines. But the Covenant fleet was in the way.

"Evasive maneuvers," said the Fleet Master. Covenant ships scattered in all directions like a shoal of fish as the juggernaut went right into their lines. A Covenant destroyer was too slow, and was crushed by the prow. The explosion came a second later.

"Aft cameras," barked Terrami. The ship's engine pods were in ruins. They could not maneuver at all.

Either the juggernaut would plow through the Imperial fleet-which was desperately trying to hold off the UNSC task force and had eyes for nothing else-or it would be pulled by Mygeeto's gravity well.

**2140 hrs**

**UNSC Cruiser "Mobile Bay"**

Captain Scott had the enemy with their backs to the wall-or in this case, Mygeeto's gravity well. He was about to signal the COM officer to contact the Imperial commander to surrender, when the NAV officer cried out.

"Large contact approaching Imperial flank."

Scott stared as the giant Imperial ship Hussein had been engaging drove right into the side of a Victory-class Star Destroyer. The comparatively smaller ship was sheered in half. The other Imperials tried to get away, but as soon as they moved they were hit by twenty five plasma torpedoes, courtesy of Fleet Master Noga Terrami. Scott wasted no time; MAC cannons and concussion missiles hit the ships and destroyed them. Mygeetan space was effectively in Allied hands.

The juggernaut, however, plunged into the atmosphere. Without the shield, it would probably burn to bits.

The battle for Mygeeto was half over. But only half.

****A/N: Looooooooong chapter, eh? I look forward to your reviews.****

6. Chapter 6: Pious Inquisitor

Chapter 6

****Coded Holo message**_**

****To: Unknown**_**

****From: Unknown**_**

****Subject: Sovereign**_**

Sovereign is down. Repeat _Sovereign_ is down. Request that _Dominance_ replace it ****immediately****.

****Coded Holo message**_**

****To: Unknown**_**

****From: Unknown**_**

****Subject: RE: Sovereign**_**

Request is denied. _Dominance_ still in need of repair. I'm sorry, Isard. Better luck next time.

****2300 hrs**_**

****UNSC Cruiser "Mobile Bay"**_**

****Task Force Sierra**_**

****Mygeeto**_**

From space, one could easily distinguish the two cruisers. The Ticonderoga-class _Mobile Bay_ was sleeker and more graceful by comparison than the larger, older and clunkier Marathon-class _Patriot_. Though the _Mobile Bay_ was indeed scarred, the hull of the _Patriot_ was peppered with holes and carbon scoring. There was a large dent where a Tartan Patrol ship had crashed. The ship had taken a beating while it engaged the _Sovereign_; at the last minute, the Imperial commander had freed his main batteries to fire at the cruiser, and the _Mobile Bay_ had linked up and towed it away.

But none of these things was on Captain William Scott's mind as he stood next to Captain Sharif Hussein. They were listening to a message from Admiral Montgomery, head of all three sections of the Office of Naval Intelligence.

"_I want your boys to find the crash sight of the _Sovereign_ and secure it. That thing is a treasure trove of intelligence on the

enemy, and I sure as hell don't want it to fall into Imperial hands again."_

Hussein said "Yes sir," but Scott wasn't inclined to agree.

"With all due respect sir, I can't do that. My priority is to capture the capital. Orders straight from **Fleet **Admiral Hood." He put an emphasis on Hood's rank to get his point across.

"_I'm countermanding those orders."_

Scott's eyes widened; a lower ranked officer, countermanding orders given by a _Fleet Admiral?_ "You can't-"

Hussein intervened. "Sir, the Spartans under my command can secure that ship. Captain Scott's men needn't be involved."

Montgomery sighed. _"Very well. I'm ordering your Spartans to secure the wreckage of the _Sovereign_. Montgomery out."_

"You should thank me, Bill," said Hussein, "I saved you from a court martial."

Scott grunted.

"I'll take that as a 'thank you'."

"No offense to you Sharif, but I despise ONI and everything they do that keeps me in the dark. Now, they don't even have a sense of subordination, unless it suits their interests."

"That's ONI. Until you become Admiral, you can't do anything about it, Scott."

Scott stared out the window into space. Squadrons of Pelicans, Lance fighters and Longsword bombers were flocking to the surface. Amongst them was a dropship that carried fourteen Spartans. "I wish I could."

**0045 hrs**

_Imperial 28th Battalion

**Engaging Marine O-Company, Light Armor Division**

**Mygeeto**

The tall towers smoldered and shuddered as they were hit by stray rounds of fire. Lemuroid Mygeetans and tall gangly Muuns ran this way and that, trying to get to the evacuation ships. Many ships were shot down by enemy Sky Hawk fighters. On the ground, a group of stormtroopers took potshots at steadily advancing Marines from behind a durasteel barricade. Their commander was Jaster Vel.

Vel was once the adopted son of a Mandalorian warrior. He had run away from Concord Dawn at the age of ten and joined the emergent Imperial Army at eighteen. His talents on the battlefield were quickly noticed during the Galactic Civil War, and he had attained the rank of General by the time the present war had started. Despite

brilliant leadership in the early stages of the war, superior UNSC and Covenant forces had hammered his men on many worlds till he was reduced to the rank of Commander.

But none of these things was on Commander Vel's mind as he directed the defense. He gazed at the sky for a second, and he could make out the shapes of UNSC and Covenant ships in low orbit. There were also dagger-shaped ships: New Republic Acclamator-class ships. "Three armies," muttered Vel, "and only one army to counter." He turned to direct the defense again. "Focus on that jeep! Oh-six, use that Plex launcher. Thermal dets over that wall, troopers."

The orders were carried out. The Warthog exploded as a rocket hit dead on and the thermal detonators flushed out a group of Marines. Those that had survived the explosion were struck by a hail of blaster bolts. Vel raised his own rifle and shot down a Marine that had aimed at him. The remaining Marines pulled back to the relative safety of what used to be the energy collective of the worker drones. Given precious time, Vel called in for reinforcements. No answer came over the COM, only static.

Suddenly, from behind Vel came a shout: "Drop your weapons!"

Vel whirled around and saw that a group of Marines had outflanked them. The barrier on the other end of the road must have fallen. Before Vel could order his own troopers to open fire, two Warthogs with mounted Gauss cannons rumbled into position behind the Marines. Vel knew there was no way they could withstand such firepower. His blaster rifle fell in the thin snow with a soft clatter. The rest of his troopers followed suit. Overhead, a purple Covenant Phantom dropship hovered, monitoring the troopers with all of its three plasma cannons.

Vel saw one of the soldiers walk up to him, a swagger in his step. The man took out a narq dart.

"Guten Nacht," he said with a smile.

Vel felt the needle puncture his neck seal, and he blacked out.

**0850 hrs**

**New Covenant Cruiser "Pious Inquisitor"**

**3000 meters above Mygeetan Capital**

Jaster Vel woke up with a start. He found himself staring at a purple ceiling. He tried to get up, but a force field resisted his movements.

"Sleep well?"

Vel turned towards the source of the voice. A human in a black Naval uniform smiled coldly back at him. "Who are you, and where am I?" demanded Vel.

The man got walked slowly around the platform the Imperial commander was bound to. "To answer your first question, I'm Lieutenant Commander Nathan Grey, ONI Section 3. As for where you areâ€¦well,

the color should've given you a clue."

"I'm in a Covenant ship."

Grey smiled. "Right on the first try! You are on the Covenant cruiser '_Pious Inquisitor_'. Ever heard of it? No? Well, let me tell you a story." Grey took out a small black pipe and lit it. "About thirty-seven years ago, my government had first contact with the first non human species we had ever seen. However, their intentions were not peaceful, and they waged a terrible war on humankind."

"The Covenant."

"Exactly. Once they destroyed our fleet, they would bombard the planet with plasma. The atmosphere would boil away, the oceans would evaporate, and the forests would burn. This process was called 'glassing'. On the ground, they would kill every human they saw, civilian and soldier alike. Or so we thought.

"Intelligence reports in the latter years of the war showed UNSC transponder signals in some Covenant ships. You don't need to ask how we knew that; I won't tell you. We realized the Covenant did take prisonersâ€|just not many. They were interrogated, tortured, and afterwards killed. It seems that there was a separate class of cruisers dedicated to prisoner interrogation. The most infamous was the Pious Inquisitor."

"This shipâ€|?"

"Uh-huh. Inquisitor's crew had a unique way of torture and interrogation. They would bind the prisoner in question to a surgical bed just like the one you're on. Then the torture began. First, they would burn you by heating up the bed. Then they would hit you with a weapon. Not so hard that you would die, but hard enough. Then they would take a serrated knife and saw off your limbs. Slowly. If you can turn your head around enough, you can see the stains. Human blood has a nasty habit of sticking around, eh? Anyways, after you had fainted from the screaming and the pain and the loss of blood, they would stabilize you. Bring you back from the edge of death. I haven't the foggiest idea how they reattach the limbs, but they do. This would go on for days, until you had blabbered every secret you knew, even the ones they didn't need to know. When that was over, they'd torture you again. But this time, they let you bleed to death. Then the Jackals ate you." Grey leaned closer to Vel's pale face. "I was once captured by this ship. I watched as they tortured an Ensign. Do you know what it's like, to see a battle hardened over-thirty man scream for his mother? To see a Jackal carve its filthy symbols into a man's flesh? The only reason I was saved was because the Elites had turned against the former leadership of the Covenant and they took over this ship. I consider myself lucky. How about you?"

Vel didn't answer. He felt cold sweat cover his body, and for some reason the room seemed chilly. Very chilly.

Grey got up and extinguished his pipe. "Well, if you live through the first night, I'll come here to talk with you tomorrow morning. Unless you want to go through that again, I suggest you spill the beans on everything you know. Unlike the Old Covenant, I'm willing to let you go if you tell us. Okay? Well, goodnight."

Grey exited the room, where he was met by an Elite in purple armor with a red trim; he was a Questioner. "You will actually release him?" asked the Elite.

"Of course not."

A/N: Bet you didn't think I'd give the UNSC a darker side. But what can you expect of ONI? And you can't really expect the Covenant's methods to entirely change. Reviews are greatly appreciated.

7. Chapter 7: Bad Day at the Office

Chapter 7

**2300 hrs**

**Coruscant (Triple Zero)**

Lieutenant Robert Whitmore walked briskly towards his waiting transport. Here, in the hornet's nest, he went by the pseudonym Commander Forn Gelleon, of Imperial Intelligence, currently stationed on Triple Zero and tasked with finding a way to counter the Covenant plasma torpedoes' capability to burn away at Imperial shields. Whitmore also went by the ONI codename, The Needle. His actual task was to find and send to AlCom classified Imperial information. This included stats on the latest Imperial military advances in technology. If the tech was considered to compromise Allied security, Whitmore was authorized to sabotage it. So far, he had destroyed an Imperial prototype MAC gun, an electromagnetic torpedo that would nullify the UNSC's MAC guns and the Covenant plasma shaping system, and a new type of heavy fighter that was capable of utilizing the Imperial neutron bomb. So far, it looked like simple mechanical inadequacies to Imperial Security forces. So far, no one, not even his 'boss', Ysanne Isard, suspected him; far from it. But that was about to change.

Darth Vader had summoned Whitmore to speak with him. Whitmore had had an upgrade to his neural interface that allowed him to resist for a period of time the power of the Force. In short, Vader wouldn't be able to read his mind easily. But the advantage wouldn't last under Vader's full power. But, Vader did not suspect him enough to use the Force. Yet.

The shuttle nimbly navigated through Coruscant's clogged skyways. A few times, the pilot blasted an unfortunate traveler who happened to be in the way. Whitmore cringed. He never could attain the level of indifference that Colonel Ackerson or Nathan Grey had. But for now, he had to play the part of a cruel, merciless intelligence official. He turned to the side window. Outside, Vader's private residence was growing in size as the shuttle made a beeline towards it.

The Mansion of the High Executor of the Emperor was Vader's home of sorts. It was one of the most heavily guarded buildings on Coruscant. Two ship-scale gun batteries were located all over the structure. Flocks of TIE fighters and Interceptors patrolled the area. At any one time, one thousand stormtroopers of the elite 501st, also known as 'Vader's Fist', were stationed there. Over eighty Storm Commandos were also there, as was Vader's own Red Robe guards. In the distance, Whitmore could see the ruins of the old Jedi temple. And if one was

close enough and had a good eye, one could see the Imperial flag fluttering lazily over the ruins.

The shuttle made a soft landing on the open platform. Whitmore waited for the ramp to come down, made sure his red uniform was neat and tidy, and briskly stepped out. On either side, rank upon rank of 501st troopers stood at attention on either side of the landing platform. It was a mere formality, he knew. Those troopers would shoot him without a second thought if Vader wanted it. Whitmore felt a slight rumbling as the platform retracted into the mansion and the light was blotted out by massive blast doors. Overhead, bright lights flickered on, and striding down the aisle was Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith and the Emperor's right hand.

Whitmore didn't intend to show Vader that he was afraid. "You summoned me, Lord Vader?" he said in his best Coruscanti accent.

"Yes," said Vader. "I wanted to speak with you about something I suspect. I sense there is a traitor in Imperial Intelligence."

Whitmore carefully controlled his facial expressions. "A traitor, my lord?"

"That is the way I have seen it. I want to find him, but I cannot trust anyone, not even your superior. That is why I want you to find the traitor. Your current mission has been cancelled and will be carried out by others. First of all, I want you to recover Ysanne Isard from Mygeeto, where she has committed a blunder by allowing the Sovereign to fall victim to UNSC attacks. Before you do that, I want you to take thirty Star Destroyers and annihilate the Allied task force. You will have enough stormtroopers to finish off the Allied ground forces."

Whitmore nodded. "Yes, my lord. It will be done."

"Or you will regret it."

**0300 hrs**

**UNSC Cruiser "Mobile Bay"**

**Task Force Sierra**

**In geosynchronous orbit around Mygeeto**

Captain William Scott winced as the intercom buzzed and jerked him out of a deep sleep. He swung his legs off the bunk bed and keyed the COM. "Scott here."

"_Captain?"_

"Yes lieutenant?"

"_Please report to the bridge, sir. It's urgent."_

Scott walked briskly onto the bridge. The bridge crew, normally a little lax after a victorious battle, was paying close attention to their monitors. "Status report."

"Thirty Imperial warships. Twenty Victory-class and ten Imperial-II class."

"Enemy warships firing!" said the OPS officer.

Charts on the main viewer showed energy spikes on the Star Destroyers' main batteriesâ€|that quickly dropped.

"What the hell?" muttered Scott.

The Imperial ships floated dead in space. Lights all over each ship winked out as their power mysteriously drained. A single shuttle left the lead ship and accelerated towards the Allied lines.

"Lock on to that shuttle, but don't open fire until I give the go ahead," said Scott. "Try pinging it for a response."

"Channel's open, sir."

"This is the _UNSC Mobile Bay_, " said Scott. "Identify yourself."

"_Lieutenant Robert Whitmore, Section Three, ONI. Transmitting ID number now."_

There was a pause as an officer confirmed Robert's information. "He's clear, sir."

"Lieutenant, you are authorized to land in Launch Bay Seven," said Scott. He glanced at the screen. The Imperials were still floating around. Some of them, however, were powering up again. "Lock weapons on those dead Star Destroyers and fire at will."

Two dull thumps resounded through _Mobile Bay_'s hull as the MAC guns fired, followed by a rumbling vibration as Archer missiles left their pods. The rest of the fleet followed suit; plasma torpedoes, MAC rounds and turbolaser bolts streaked across space.

The Star destroyers burned and flexed as they bore the Allies' wrath. Some were destroyed outright. Others became swiss cheesed with holes. Still others crashed into each other. The once very dangerous Imperial fleet was in shambles.

Scott knew he was very lucky. If Robert hadn't planted that virus, the battle would have lasted longer, with many Allied casualties.

"That worked out well."

Scott turned around to see a man in an Imperial red uniform saluting him. For a split second, he nearly went for his pistol before realizing who this was. "You're Lieutenant Whitmore, aren't you?"

"Yes sir."

"At ease, Lieutenant. Let's talk in my office."

Inside, Scott invited Whitmore to sit down. "Lieutenant, how on earth

did you manage to get out of that ship? Didn't the crew try to catch you?"

Whitmore smiled. "With this," he said, pulling from his sleeve a long, thin stiletto knife. "And this," he grinned as he pulled his blaster from its holster. He replaced the weapons, and his grin faded. "My mission's just gone down the shitter."

"Why would you say that?"

"I was stationed on Coruscant to sabotage enemy tech and infiltrate Imperial Intelligence. When Darth Vader hears his most trusted servant is missing, he'll know exactly why. Vader's no fool, and he won't be happy when he hears about this."

"I bet he will."

Scott returned to his room. He found that he couldn't sleep, so he decided to turn on the news. Thanks to new COM relays (Forerunner of course), the news was only a few hours old. CNN appeared on the screen.

"â€¦more on that later. Cindy Wilson is reporting from Sydney, where a large group of anti-war protesters has gathered outside UNSC High Command's office in this city."_

" '_Enough is enough', they cry. Many here are tired of the fighting, and say that the military isn't concerned about the people it protects."_

The man leading the group was wearing a brightly colored shirt and a sign that said "ENOUGH IS ENOUGH". _"This war has been going on for too long! We need to bring our boys home!"_

"_Sir, don't you think we should finish this fight before-"_

"_NO! Enough is enough!"_

Scott snorted.

The view cut back to the first male anchorman. _"Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood, still on the front lines of the Imperial War, has finally issued a reply to President Georges of France's allegation that the military has garnered too much power since the outbreak of the Covenant War, and they aren't willing to give it up."_

Hood in his neatly pressed white navy uniform stood before a news conference. _"The allegations are both true and not true. It is true that the military has gotten a lot of attention from the government since Harvest, but it is not true that we are 'the real rulers' of Earth as the president says. That power lies with the United Earth Government. We have no real 'power' in the government to give up."_

"_Sir, is it true that an Imperial ship nearly destroyed your entire battle group?"_

"_If they did, we wouldn't be having this pleasant conversation."_

"_Sir, what are your views on ONI's trial of Imperial Officer Illia Daala?"_

"_That's not my concern. Go ask ONI."_

"_They refuse to comment."_

"_So do I. Do you have any more questions?"_

"_Yes. How long will the war last, in your opinion?"_

"_It depends. Allied forces are steadily pushing the Imperials back, but they have a strong navy and a large army. It may take up to a year at least to force the Imperials into a position to surrender unconditionally. Then we'll show them how it is to have a foreign navy pound **their **home planet."_

"_What will happen after the Imperials are overthrown?"_

"_The New Republic will take over after that. They are planning to send an invitation to the UEG to have a representative in their Senate."_

"_Will the Republic have enough power to restore order in the galaxy?"_

"_With this new clone army, plus new ships, I think they can handle it. If necessary, a UNSC and Covenant joint fleet consisting of no more than one hundred and fifty ships will assist the new government."_

"_Is it true that UNSC officers and soldiers are being recruited into the Jedi Academy on Yavin 4?"_

"_They aren't being recruited. You have to have special characteristics to be a Jedi, and those that are willing are indeed joining the academy."_

"_Do you acknowledge the fact that a set of people who call themselves Mandalorians have attacked both Imperial and Allied ships?"_

"_Yes. Measures are being taken to eliminate this threat. As to why they've attacked both parties; Mandalorians are seemingly a fiercely independent people. They choose no sides unless they have a lot of cash to gain. Neither side has any to spare, so they raid both sides."_

"_Will the fleet move to hit Concord Dawn, the Mandalorians' home world?"_

"_Frankly, I don't know yet." _

"_Sir, is it true that ONI uses-"_

"_Go ask ONI. And if they refuse to comment, don't be surprised. We don't discuss tactical information with civilians, whether they like it or not. This meeting is closed."_

The view cut back to the reporter, now standing in a civilian ship.

Outside, one could see the massive Allied Navy above Kamino.
"Military personnel escorted us back to the ship. A senior military officer who refused to give his name said that Marine casualties are indeed high, but not as high as those in the disastrous Covenant War. As long as the Imperials refuse to surrender, the Marines will continue to fight on the frontlines. Back to you, Brian."

"_That was Will Preston reporting from Kamino. A large freighter was stormed by UN security forces in the Epsilon Eridanus System after a tip suggested that members of the outlawed 'Frieden' movement were inside. Secu-"_

Scott had seen enough. Civilians back home were so annoying. During the Covenant war they firmly believed that the military wasn't doing its job the best they could. They didn't know that the military's best hadn't been enough. Morale and society sagged. There were so many movements. Scott remembered his ex telling him about a group of college dropouts that started a 'don't die a virgin' campaign. In the end, STDs became a major concern after the war. As if the UN didn't have enough on its plate already. Then the second invasion by the Imperials shocked anti-war protesters into silence. Imperial brutality fueled support for the war effort. But the fire was dying now. Now they were wasting time.

Scott was impressed with Hood's terse yet warm attitude. He answered questions he deemed OK to the best he could, but those he couldn't he quickly dismissed. The press enjoyed grilling military officers, but Hood denied them the pleasure of seeing him squirm.

Scott and the rest of the Navy knew, as the press didn't, that the fleet was indeed preparing to move against Concord Dawn. As soon as the mission on Mygeeto was over, all operational Spartans would be recalled to the _Patriot_. The _Patriot_ would then link up with the _Mobile Bay_, the Halcyon-class cruiser _Midnight Sun_ and the _Asgard_, an Iroquois-class cruiser. A support group of ten Zanzibar-class destroyers would be on station just in case. Then they would head to Concord Dawn.

Only time would tell who would prevail: the fierce and extremely dangerous Mandalorian warriors, or the UNSC Navy and the equally dangerous Spartan super soldiers.

**0300 hrs**

**Spartan Blue Team**

**Crash site of HIMS Sovereign**

**Mygeeto**

Master Chief Petty Officer Spartan John-117 surveyed the crash site. The ship seemed to be mostly intact. Hundreds of small fires peppered the space-black hull and the immediate area surrounding the ship. By the light of those fires, he could see stormtroopers on patrol. Others were tending to the wounded. Some were putting out the fires. There was no sign of any storm commandos, but John knew that was subject to change. The Imperials obviously knew their ship was a prize, and they obviously set a trap.

Joshua-05 chimed in. _"It looks like they're preparing for a major

assault, Blue lead. I can see the anti-fighter flaks moving around, and some of those turbolaser turrets too. A lot of fighter tanks are exiting the ship, along with those new TIE Mauler tanks. It'll be a tough nugget to crack for the Marines."_

"Except the Marines won't be taking it, at least not now." He focused the S2AM Sniper Rifle's scope over the perimeter established by the enemy. There was one hole in the defense, too conspicuous to be a mistake. He could barely make out movement in the shadows of some too-conveniently-placed pieces of durasteel. That was where the trap was located. "Red Team, neutralize those tanks. Blue Team, we'll be taking out those guns. Green Team, you're sniper cover. Commence attack at oh-three hundred and five hours. Blue lead out."

**A/N: Yep, Chapter 9 will have a Mando-Spartan battle. Chapter 8 will focus mostly on the Chief. I used this chapter to focus on the difficulties on the frontlines and the home front. BTW, Whitmore is the 'mysterious' agent in Athens in the first story, for those who didn't get it. **

8. Chapter 8: Battle for Mygeeto Part II

**A/N: I forgot to add this in the previous chapter, but I want everyone reading my story to know this. I appreciate constructive criticism. This means stuff like, 'Hey, I think you made a mistake here, just wanted you to know'. I don't like 'OMFG, ure story sucks!'. If you don't like it, why are you reading? Just like Bronx Shogun said, I don't listen to the haters. Get a life, you guys, and don't review like retards please. **

**0304 hrs**

**Spartan Blue Team**

**Crash Site of HIMS Sovereign**

**Mygeeto**

One minute. One minute, and the apparent calm of the makeshift Imperial camp would be shattered by a lightning strike in the form of thirty Spartans.

John-117 noticed faint explosions and flashes of light in the west; the Marines were preventing the Imperials from linking up with the crash survivors. From the looks of it, they were having a tough time. The 116th were mostly an infantry unit. Their heaviest weapons were Jackhammers and Warthog-mounted Gauss cannons. Not exactly the ideal weapons to use against an ATAT walker. John could see some of the immense machines'

sihlouettes outlined against some of the explosions. That meant the main Imperial army was advancing fast.

When there was thirty seconds left to the countdown, John readied his MA5C. The C variant had a grenade launcher that was useful against fighter tanks and clusters of enemy troops. He checked his M6D pistol, his Jackhammer, and his grenade belt which was filled with plasma grenades, frags, and thermal detonators that Red team had liberated from an Imperial battalion.

This part of the plan would be difficult. To avoid the Imperial trap and to throw them into confusion, Green Team would launch a concerted attack on the strongest position with their sniper rifles. The Imperial commander would then send the Storm Commandos in charge of the trap to reinforce the position. Red and Blue teams would then slip through the gap while Green Team evaded and slaughtered the Imperials that would try to hunt them down.

At T-minus five seconds Green Team took aim. At T minus one second Red and Blue teams leapt out of cover and made for the gap, moving so quickly the Imperials didn't notice. At T-minus zero, all hell broke loose.

Ten simultaneous shots split the air as Green Team's S2AM rifles fired. An identical number of stormtroopers fell, trails of vapor fading away above their corpses. Green team fired again. And again. And again. Stormtroopers fell like flies.

John could see forty Storm Commandos burst from hiding. They made a beeline for Green Teams position and the battered Imperial position. The Chief resisted the urge to fire on their flank; it would only bring unwanted attention. Red and Blue Teams activated their camo as they proceeded towards the middle of the camp, where there was little cover.

The ship was huge, which made it hard for the Imperial troops to guard it efficiently. There were numerous rents and tears in the hull, too many to guard, so twenty Spartans were able to slip in without anyone noticing.

"Cortana," said the Master Chief, "where are we?"

"One moment," said the AI. "We are inside what remains of one of the portside launch bays."

She was right. Pieces of TIE fighters of all major variants littered the area. Some hung limply from their stands. As John watched, an Interceptor with a missing wing crashed to the floor with a loud clang.

"We got to get moving, Chief," said Cortana. "They probably haven't noticed us yet, but they will most likely send out search and destroy parties."

"It's one thing to know we're coming," said Tom-88. "It's another thing entirely for them to do anything about it."

**0309 hrs**

**UNSC Cruiser "Mobile Bay"**

**Mygeeto**

"Say again?" said a bewildered Captain Scott.

The image of fellow Captain William Sherman frowned back at him from the Com screen. _"I said, Task Force Victor is in the Concord Dawn system."_

"You're not supposed to be in that system," said Scott. "No Allied ship is supposed to be there. Who in AlCom let this shit happen?"

Sherman's face grew ugly. "_Colonel Hathaway. He may be one hell of a spook, but he ain't no ship driver."_

"Hathaway? As in, head of Section Three ONI?"

"_That's the one."_

"Son of a bitch. What have you guys done so far?"

"_Well, the Colonel didn't want any Mandies escaping-"

—

" 'Mandies'?"

"_Mandalorians. We blockaded the planet. They didn't respond at all, so we sent a team of SEALs to test the waters. Their biomonitors flatlined ten minutes after making landfall. They're there, all right. They're just waiting for us to land. They have the home advantage, and they'll just slaughter the Marines. They will be a tough nugget."_

"I'll say."

"_According to old records, the most recent major campaign against the Mandalorians was an Old Jedi Order mission. They succeeded, but they lost half their number. Most of the Mandies were killed, 'cept for one: Jango Fett."_

"Fett? Like the one we hired early in the campaign?"

"_It's his daddy we're talking 'bout. He allegedly killed a number of Jedi with his bare hands."_

"So hammering the Marines will be a cakewalk for his son?"

"_Yep. The Spartans, however, are a different story. They'll sweep through those Mandies like God's breath through the Red Sea."_

"I hope so. But thanks to that idiot Hathaway, we've lost the element of surprise."

"_Knowing those Spartans, I doubt it'll make any difference."_ Sherman paused. "_They say the Friedans are rising again, in the Eridanus Sector. Looks like that bastard Giles survived after all."_

"How? Thirty Covenant Cruisers engaged him and his little rock. I don't see how he could be alive."

"_Neither do I. In any case, he's talking. Says he wants revenge on 'Imperial Earth' for 'abandoning' him when his needs were most dire."_

"Is he successful?"

"_Nope. UN Security beat the stuffing out of his little fleet. They

just need to find his base, and its over."_

Sherman and Scott said their goodbyes and Scott turned on the news. This time, they were showing footage of a space battle. UN Security forces in cutters and frigates engaged a smaller force of outdated space craft. Scott had turned on the TV in time to see the rebels trapped by superior UN forces.

"_In the most shocking report since the outbreak of the Imperial War,"_ said the reporter, "_Friedan rebels and UN Security fleets clashed in the first such encounter in over five centuries. ONI officials believed that the rebel leaders thought that since the bulk of the Fleet was engaged in distant theatres of war, they could rise to power again. UN forces shut down the Unified German Republic Corporations in response. _

George McClellan, the president and head of the United Earth Government, appeared on the screen. "_This is the most outrageous act of treachery since the Ackerson Affair. I have authorized ONI to use whatever means necessary to root out other supporters of this cause."_

"_Sir, isn't most of the Fleet's resources far away?"_

"_Fleet Admiral Harper is sure that we have the resources necessary to put down this threat without pulling any forces from the frontlines."_

"_What are your comments on the 'Enough is Enough' movement?"_

"_Utterly ridiculous. We don't leave a job half done, and we certainly aren't going to let the Imperials off the hook for their unwarranted and unprovoked attack on our colonies."_

Scott turned it off. If things were getting bad at home, it was only a matter of time before some of the Fleet was recalled to deal with the new threat. And with Coruscant still in enemy hands, it would make the fight harder.

**0356 hrs**

**Spartan Blue Team**

**Crash site of HIMS Sovereign**

**Mygeeto**

A stormtrooper screamed, an assault rifle stuttered, and the last enemy in the fire control room was neutralized. The Master Chief paused only a second to admire his team's handiwork before transferring Cortana into the ships systems. Red Team was busy turning tanks into scrap metal outside and Green Team was adding to the Imps' woes with their sniper rifles, so no one really cared about Blue Team except the few troopers still inside the ship.

"Well," said Cortana, "the ship's guns are disabled. There aren't many troopers inside, so taking the ship will be easy for the Marines."

"Or for us," said the Chief. "How are the 116th doing?"

Cortana paused. "They've pulled back. Apparently, they suffered enormous casualties. The New Republic 182nd Legion is taking its place. At least they have the weapons to take those walkers out. Three divisions of the 182nd are advancing here. They'll be here in an hour."

"Which means we have one hour to make the Imperials' lives extremely miserable," said Gary-76.

"Right," said the Chief. "We'll start by heading for the command deck; try and take some of the bridge crew alive for interrogation."

"Yes sir, but it's the 'alive' bit that complicates things."

John didn't say anything, but he privately agreed. However, he couldn't let his personal feelings dictate the way he went about his duties. Live bridge crew would be a grand prize for ONI.

Blue Team moved quickly and silently through the corridors, occasionally pausing to deal with patrol sweeps that still lingered inside the vessel. Nearly an hour later, they reached the bridge.

The doors were large and as unyielding as rock.

The Master Chief transferred Cortana to a control surface. Once inside, she worked her wonders.

"What's inside, Cortana?" asked the Chief.

"Want me to spoil the surprise? A ten-person team of Storm Commandos, an Imperial captain, and an Intelligence officer are inside. Their auto turret grid is offline now, thanks to yours truly. From the look of things, they don't know that we're right on their doorstep."

The video feed appeared in the Chief's visor. Storm Commandos in jet-black armor walked here and there, not alert at all. Some were just ambling in circles. The officers were standing in front of the main view screen, staring out over the tortured hull of the Sovereign and the blasted snowy plains of Mygeeto.

Easy, relaxed targets. Perfect.

The Master Chief said, "Open the doors, Cortana."

Major Ysanne Isard and Captain Dann Needa had their backs to the single blast door, so they didn't know that Spartan super-soldiers had entered the bridge until the commando standing to the left of Isard made a funny noise that sounded like a cross between a choke and a gurgle. She turned to see the commando lying in a pool of his own blood, shot in the neck. She whirled around, blaster already in hand, when she saw ten green-armored giants charge into the room, guns blazing. She fired a shot at one of the Spartans, causing his shields to flare golden. The soldier turned and fired a burst over the officer's head. Isard ducked.

The Master Chief, having forced the Imperial officer to take cover,

returned his attention to the commandos. Three had already been killed in the first few seconds, but the other seven were putting up a fight. The Chief sprayed a commando with a steady stream of brass, then followed up with a blast from his M45 grenade launcher. The attack killed two commandos. Another fierce exchange of fire ended the firefight.

Blue Two and Blue Nine, ignoring the pistol fire, disarmed the two officers. They then injected polypseudomorphine to knock them out. Suddenly, the ground trembled.

The Master Chief looked outside. New Republic forces had arrived. AT-TE walkers and TX-180C Fighter Tanks followed by hordes of clone troopers charged across the field, overwhelming the weakened Imperial positions. John's keen eyesight picked out flashes of green armor; his Spartans were with them.

The Battle for Mygeeto was over.

9. Chapter 9:Battle for Concord Dawn Part I

Chapter 9

**0230 hrs**

**UNSC Super Destroyer "Jacob Keyes"**

**Task Force Victor**

**Concord Dawn**

Captain William Sherman sat lazily in the command chair. It had been several hours since the deployment of the SEAL teams, and besides the Naval soldiers' swift deaths, there had been no response.

"Status report," said the captain.

"No Mandalorian activity detected," replied the AI Ares.

"Confirmed," said the OPS officer. "Entire system's as quiet as the grave."

"Continue scans and report any disturbance." Sherman was worried, as was the man who stood next to him: Colonel James Hathaway.

"This doesn't feel right," muttered the Colonel. "Eyewitness accounts say that the Mandalorian people have a small but effective fleet. So far, there's nothing."

Sherman nodded in agreement. "I think it's best if we release some of our fighters to recon the system. Maybe they're cloaked somehow."

Hathaway nodded. "I agree. Signal the Thermopylae and tell them to release her fighters on a reconnaissance pattern."

A few minutes later, four squadrons of Lance fighters left the carrier Thermopylae. They dispersed like a shoal of disturbed

fish.

Sherman knew the Mandalorians were probably trying to catch the Allied force by surprise. He wasn't that worried, however. Super Destroyers were unique ships in the UNSC Fleet. Like standard destroyers, they had no fighter launch bays. If destroyers were like heavily armored frigates, Super Destroyers were essentially cruisers with twice as much armor and heavy shielding. They could take quite a beating before being disabled. Then the enemy would have to deal with trying to penetrate six meters of honeycombed Titanium-A battle plating. Put short, Super Destroyers were the personification of the human race: extremely stubborn and unwilling to submit.

Suddenly, the COM officer said, "Receiving audio feed from Lance Squad Beta."

"Patch it through," said Hathaway.

The pilot's voice was urgent. _"We've found eighty ships of varying configurations, sir. They're located behind the fifth planet of the system. Oh hell, I think they spotted us; enemy fighters incoming!"_

"Get out of there!" yelled Sherman.

"Fall back! Fall back now!" shouted Hathaway.

The sound of blaster fire came over the COM. _"There's dozens of the bastards. Their fighters are insanely overpowered. Trying to shake 'em. Lost Beta Six and Beta Three. Shit, I've lost five more. They've trapped us. Am taking heavy fire. One enemy casualty confirmed. I-"

_

The COM erupted into static. Another panicking voice came over the COM.

"_Be advised, enemy fleet is approaching on your six. At least eighty or more ships."_ Then the pilot screamed, and there was only static.

"Energy surges detected," said the OPS officer. "They're consistent with ship-scale engine emissions."

Hathaway paused for a moment. "COM officer. Broadcast to all ships. Effective immediately: to all ships, all personnel; Tactical command of Task Force Victor has been handed over to Captain William Sherman of the _UNSC Jacob Keyes_. Hathaway out."

Sherman turned to the COM officer. "Lieutenant, alert Task Force Sierra and AlCom: we have engaged the enemy."

**0356 hrs**

**UNSC "Mobile Bay" **

**Task Force Sierra**

**Mygeeto**

The skies above Mygeeto were abuzz with activity. Covenant Engineers

and workers in EVA suits were hard at work repairing the damaged vessels of the fleet. After receiving the message from Captain Sherman, it was clear to Captain Scott that he would have a better chance going in with a repaired and revitalized fleet rather than rush in with a damaged one.

Rather than go in with just UNSC ships as originally planned, Scott had decided to add all the Covenant ships as well. There was rumor that the Arbiter himself would lead another fleet, though it wasn't official yet.

Finally, the clouds of workers ceased their work and floated back to their ships, closely followed by squadrons of human and Covenant fighters. The task force was ready.

Captain Scott opened a channel to every ship. "To all craft and personnel: effective immediately; control of Mygeeto and the rest of this system has passed to the New Republic Captain Seto Kannaras. All other ships, prepare for the collective jump into Slipspace."

The fleet followed the _Mobile Bay _to the edge of the system, where the massive gravitational force caused by the collective jump would not effect the habitable planets.

Inside the Ticonderoga-class cruiser, there was one room set apart from the rest; a briefing room for the Spartans and the Sharquoi, the Covenant equivalent of the Spartans. This was where Master Chief Spartan John-117 and his team found themselves, seated with helmets off.

The Master Chief found himself in the second row with the rest of the surviving Spartan-IIs. Behind him were the Spartan-IVs and behind them were Elites in black armor that seemed to absorb the light. To John's surprise, a number of Marines walked in, including Sergeant Major Avery J. Johnson.

Johnson saluted, then held out his hand to shake. "How're ya doin', Chief?"

The Master Chief shook the proffered hand. "If you don't mind my asking," began the Chief, "what are you doing here?"

The black man grinned, revealing a set of spotless white teeth. "Seems I'm the first in a line o' heroes, Chief."

Before John could ask what that meant, Captain William Scott and Lieutenant Robert Whitmore walked in, causing every man in the room to stand at attention. "Captain on deck!" he barked.

The two men returned the salutes. "At ease," said the Captain. He then nodded to Whitmore, who stepped forward.

"Hello to you all," he began. "My name is Lieutenant Robert Whitmore, and I am affiliated with Section Three of the Office of Naval Intelligence. Present here before me are all operational Spartans of every class we currently have; the One, Two and Four series."

Johnson was a Spartan-I? Having seen the way the man fought, and his unbelievable luck, John realized he should have known this. His

thoughts were interrupted when the lieutenant resumed speaking.

"Also present here are members of the Sharquoi, the most elite of the Covenant warriors. We have gathered you all here, the best fighters in the UNSC and the Covenant, for the difficult mission ahead of you. You will be pitted against perhaps the best warriors in this side of the galaxy: the Mandalorian super-commandos. They are a warrior race who have defied almost every enemy that has fought them, never ever submitting to any force. They have even held their own against the Jedi, for a time.

"I am not telling you this to discourage you, but to let you know what you are up against. The Spartans have never failed and neither has the Sharquoi. Where other forces failed against the Mandalorians, you will succeed. Allied Command, the people of Earth and the subjects of the Covenant all have faith in you and the fact that you will get the job done.

"The enemy has the advantage of being on the home field. They know the terrain, they can choose the battlefield. But you have an advantage of your own: you've never lost.

"Your mission is to force the Mandalorian forces to defeat. You will be dropped via HEV pods onto the surface of Concord Dawn. Armor support will follow afterwards. Since there are only a hundred of you, you will be backed up by the 101st Drop Jet Platoon and the 105th Helljumpers. General Luke Skywalker will follow you with a team of thirty Jedi Knights and their apprentices. This will be a very important battle, so it is of extreme importance that you win."

John had no doubts about that. He always won.

"Master Chief Petty Officer John-117, you have been promoted to First Lieutenant. You will have tactical command of the ground operation."

"Yes sir," replied Lieutenant 117. "Thank you sir."

"Senior Chief Petty Officer Frederic-104, you have hereby been promoted to the rank of Master Chief Petty Officer. You will be the deputy chief of the ground operation."

"Yes sir," said Fred.

"You're dismissed. Good luck."

As soon as they left the room, John started planning.

Landing would be easy. When the HEVs landed, they would secure a landing area so that the Pelican dropships could land their heavy equipment. A team of his people would bring the air support.

He could use team tactics in open warfare. The twenty five Marines, the twenty five Sharquoi, the eight Spartan IIs and the forty two Spartan IVs would operate in mixed units. Fred and Kelly would be at his side, as well as Armand-90 and Tom-88, Senior Chief and Petty Officer of the S-IVs. Dividing into groups of five, there would be five Marines, five Sharquoi Elites, eight Spartan-IVs and one Spartan II. Each would have its own task. Blue Team would be lead by John

himself. His makeshift command staff would be spread with the other groups.

Blue Team would be on foot, outfitted with normal combat weapons but with extra ammo. They would also have most of the explosives, and be on anti-vehicle duty.

Red Team would pilot the vehicles. A Marine would occupy the tank while the other Marines sat on the treads. Three of the Spartans would occupy a Gauss Hog and three of the Elites would occupy a Specter. The other two Elites and Spartans would pilot Ghosts. It would be led by Fred.

All of Green Team would be on sniper duty. They would be backed up by Black Team, who would protect the snipers. It would be led by Tom and Armand, respectively.

All of Gold Team would pilot some aerial vehicle. The Elites and Spartans would pilot Banshees and the Marines would pilot Falcon Attack Gunships provided by the Marine Air Wing. Kelly would lead the air attack.

Every team would be heavily armed with personal weapons. For this mission, they had ditched the M6C Magnum for the M6D variant. The BR55s would have a M45 grenade launcher attached, and the others would take MA5Cs. Both Jackhammer variants, the M41 SSR and the M19 SSM would be used. The former would be used against vehicles and the latter against clusters of troops and fixed positions. Shotguns would be part of the armament, too.

His force of special warriors, named "The Argonauts" would lead the effort, followed by the ODS'Ts.

He pulled maps of Concord Dawn from the ONI database. The main Mandalorian settlement was located on a hill. Judging by the photograph, one could see for miles from the hill top. However, John wasn't about to fall into the trap that Boba Fett had devised. He would try to trap the Argonauts by pinning them in between the hill and the main Mandalorian force. John would counter by having Gold Team assault the hill, taking out any snipers and any other element. Black Team would secure the hill for Green Team. Black Team would hold the hill while Green team sniped. Blue Team would lead the initial attack, taking out as many enemy vehicles as possible in the first two rocket volleys. Then Red Team would charge in, throwing the enemy into confusion. Black and Green Teams would proceed to their objectives while Blue Team pinned the rest of the Mandalorians inside the fort on the hill. Then the 105th ODST Division and the 205th Marine Division would engage. When the bulk of the Mandalorians had been dealt with, Blue and Black Teams would force their way inside the fort and try to capture Boba Fett or his officers. If they resisted, they were to be killed.

His plan ready, John issued his orders. There was work to be done, and he intended to use every minute to get it done.

**0500 hrs**

**UNSC Super Destroyer "Jacob Keyes"**

**Task Force Victor**

**Engaging Mandalorian Fleet **

**Concord Dawn**

The battle had raged for two hours and a half, and neither side had gained an advantage. Although the Mandalorians had numerical superiority-eighty ships against fifty-Task Force Victor's ship drivers had better experience and training. The UNSC had lost eight ships and the Mandalorians had lost ten. The enemy fighters were difficult to counter. All of them were custom made and, as the dead leader of Beta squadron had pointed out, they were insanely overpowered. Five Lance squadrons and two Longsword squadrons were wiped out, with only twenty confirmed enemy casualties. The 50 mm MLA cannons took over anti-fighter business, contributing another twenty five enemy deaths. The good news was that there was so few of them.

Right now, however, Captain William Sherman's mind was somewhere else. "Are the pulse lasers powered up?"

"Yes sir."

"Fire at contact Gamma."

"Yes sir. Firing pulse lasers."

Three scintillating beams impacted on the closest Mandalorian ship, which appeared to be a heavily modified prison ship. The shields rippled and faded.

"Fire MAC 1."

"Firing MAC One, aye."

A single Plasma-MAC round left the _Jacob Keyes_, traveling so fast the Mandalorians couldn't track it. It tore a burning hole through the enemy craft. Thanks to the plasma, the fires intensified. The enemy ship listed to starboard, and then exploded.

Eleven down, sixty-nine to go.

"Sir!" cried a crewman, "Incoming concussion missile volley! Impact in five seconds!"

"Fire portside pulse laser and bring those MLAs to bear as well."

AI Ares executed the orders. Concussion missiles were melted and torn to pieces, but the vast majority made it through.

"Shields failing," said Ares. "Brace for impact."

The _Keyes'_ shields flickered and faded. Fifty missiles slammed into her hull, rocking the ship and nearly flipping her.

"Fire emergency thrusters," barked Sherman. He waited as the ship regained her position. "Status report."

"Minimal damage to outer hull. Shields regenerating at a rate of ten percent per second. We've stabilized. No casualties

reported."

"Boost power to the shields and make it twenty percent per second. Wait, strike that order. Bring us to bear on that contact. Are the other two MACs ready to fire?"

"Yes sir."

"Fire when ready, Ares."

"Aye sir. Firing MAC Two and Three."

Two thunder bolts of smoldering metal and plasma streaked through space, impacting directly with a large freighter-type vessel. The rounds obliterated it completely.

Twelve Mandalorian ships destroyed. But the _Keyes'_ success was drawing attention to it.

"Sir," said the OPS officer, "Seven enemy ships on approach."

"Ares," barked Sherman, "Are those plasma turrets recharged yet?"

"Aye sir."

"Fire everything you got."

Three hair thin lasers flashed away from the port side, then another three from the starboard side flashed as _Keyes_ turned ninety degrees to port.

The pulse lasers punched through the enemy ships' shields, disabling four and destroying two. The remaining ship was rocked to the side as it was hit by multiple MAC rounds; other UNSC ships had come to the _Keyes'_ aid. Just like that, the number of enemy ships destroyed rose to nineteen. But the Mandalorians had destroyed four ships of their own. That meant that the enemy still had sixty one ships, while Task Force Victor only had thirty-six left.

Eventually, the Mandalorians' superior numbers would whittle down the task force to nothing. Sherman hoped that the message to Mygeeto had gotten through; time was running out.

**0501 hrs**

**Mandalorian Battleship (Modified cargo type) "Canderous Ordo"**

**Mandalorian Fleet**

**Engaging Task Force Victor**

**Concord Dawn**

Boba Fett wished he could be out there, flying Slave-II, to feel the thrill of space combat. But he was Mandalore now, the leader of his people. He had a responsibility to remain alive.

So far, the Outsiders had put up a good fight. A very good fight indeed. Nineteen of his ships were destroyed or disabled, while he had only fourteen kills. He couldn't think of any way to counter their main weapon, a solid projectile that moved a hundred miles per second. The sheer mass of the round was too large for shields to withstand. One particular ship, a large heavily armored type that appeared to be the flagship, had eight kills to its name.

However, his fleet was larger, and his fighters better. It wouldn't be long now, he thought, watching a UNSC frigate disintegrate from multiple hits. Soon, the enemy fleet would be destroyed, and their technology sold to the Empire. For a high price of course. Fett wanted to integrate the Spartans' shielding technology to his own armor. Afterwards, he'd continue raiding and conquering.

"Mandalore!" cried the helmsman. 'Mandalore' was a title of the leader of the Mandalorian people, and Fett had taken up the mantle.

"What is it?"

"Seventy-five enemy ships have just entered the system. Fifty are heading towards the planet. The others are heading right for us."

"Put the 'others' on screen."

Fifty UNSC ships sped on a direct course for Concord Dawn. However, twenty-five Covenant ships, cruisers and destroyers, were heading right for his fleet. Their turrets glowed as they prepared to fire.

"Divert all power to the shields. Now!"

Twenty five bright red plasma torpedoes burned across space, homing in on the nearest ship, the Pride of Mandalore. The ship's shields flared and burned out. Durasteel bent, melted and warped as the rest of the torpedoes burned and burrowed their way into the superstructure. Seconds later, the vessel exploded.

Five Plasma torpedoes had gone off course-intentionally, it seemed-and impacted directly on the Ordo's shields. Three burned away as the shields died out.

"Fire the emergency thrusters."

The two trailing plasma torpedoes should have gone past them. Instead, they arced sharply and impacted amidships.

Fett's soldiers acted fast, venting the atmosphere from the affected sections and jettisoning other sections where the plasma still burned. The ship regained its former position.

Fett got to his feet. He hadn't expected a plasma torpedo to do that much damage. He had assumed there would be an explosive force, like most torpedoes in the galaxy. He certainly hadn't expected it to burn its way into a ship and feed the fires with the ship's oxygen supply.

The closest Covenant ship opened fire. Blue beams of energy speared the blackness of space, impacting on ships' shields, punching through and puncturing their armor. Plumes of white frozen atmosphere jetted into space and fighters turned into balls of superheated gas. Then Task Force Victor opened fire, too. MAC rounds and pulse lasers made short work of five Mandalorian ships.

The tide of the battle had changed drastically within two minutes.

Fett realized he couldn't win with the odds present before him.

"Order the fleet to retreat, but tell the commander of the _Death's Head_ to board the enemy flagship. Make sure they never forget us."

"Mandalore! A new group of signals! An Imperial fleet. They say they're here to help us."

Fett rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Maybe the situation could be salvaged after all.

**0509 hrs**

**UNSC Super Destroyer "Jacob Keyes"**

**Task Force Victor**

**Concord Dawn**

"We've got uninvited guests, sir," said AI Ares.

"Show me," said Captain Sherman, grabbing a bulkhead to keep from falling.

"A Mandalorian fighter has landed in Shuttle Bay Two. He's killed all the guards and he's making his way here."

"Activate the emergency bridge barriers." The sealed bulkhead doors slammed into place over the first set of pressure doors.

"Sir, I have more bad news."

Sherman stumbled again as a blast rocked the ship. "Spit it out."

"An Imperial fleet. Fifty Victory-II-Class, one hundred Imperial-Class, one hundred Acclamator-II-Class, and seventy Tector-Class Star Destroyers, three hundred Victory-Class Star Frigates, and several hundred boarding craft, plus innumerable fighter and bomber squadrons. Five hundred and twenty ships. They have us outnumbered now."

Sherman paled. "Contact the _Preston Cole_ and tell them we need reinforcements now!!"

"No can do, sir. We're being jammed. Ship to ship communications only."

Sherman cursed loudly. "Alert the _Hampton Roads_. Tell them to release their stealth craft. I want AlCom to be alerted. No excuses!"

**0516 hrs**

ONI Raven-Class Stealth Ship "Perimeter"

**Concord Dawn**

Lieutenant Anthony Adams gritted his teeth as he sent the stealth craft/fighter into a spin. The two missiles trailing him detonated as they collided with each other. Adams triggered the ship's 80 mm cannons, riddling a TIE Interceptor and tearing the flimsy craft apart. He flew through the wreckage, intent on leaving the battle, jumping into Slipspace and alerting the main Covenant fleet. Hood would also be with them, as would the Arbiter.

Adams glanced to his right and saw a Mandalorian ship accelerate towards the _Jacob Keyes_. Archer missiles and pulse lasers made short work of the ship, but Adams noticed a small fighter leaving the doomed vessel. He realized they were going to board the _Keyes_. He couldn't alert the flagship and risk getting noticed, nor could he engage the fighter and run the risk of getting destroyed. So he did the only thing he could.

He fled.

The space around the stealth fighter seemed to ripple, boil and tear apart as the _Perimeter_ entered Slipspace.

**0520 hrs**

UNSC Cruiser "Mobile Bay"

**Task Force Sierra**

**Concord Dawn**

"Sir," said the bridge officer, "the Argonauts are prepped for launch."

Captain William Scott said, "Initiate the landing sequence, crewman."

Several pods rocketed from the belly of the cruiser, each containing a member of the elite team chosen by AlCom to win Concord Dawn. Scott watched them until they hit the atmosphere, and then turned his attention to the massive Imperial fleet.

Truth be told, he was absolutely frightened. The enemy fleet was as large as the entire OPERATION: MARS fleet. The only ones who could save them now were the Covenant.

But, as everyone who had trained at OCS knew, numbers didn't always effect the outcome of battle.

"COM officer, patch me through to the_ General Lee_."

"Aye. Channel open, sir."

"Commander, do you have a full load of nuclear mines?"

"_Yes, Captain. Seven Ganesh-class mines hot and ready to go."_

"Position them between our fleet and the Imperials."

"_Yes, sir."_

A mine-laying ship escorted by two frigates left to do its work.

Scott put every other ship in his task force on the COM. "Focus your attacks on the Mandalorian fleet. Force them to surrender before we engage the Empire. Flanking pattern Delta."

"Sir, incoming message from the Imperial fleet commander."

"On screen, Lieutenant."

The face that Scott was seeing didn't even remotely resemble that of a human. It was skull-like, with bright yellow eyes. Whatever it was, it seemed to wear a grey cloak. It began to speak in a raspy, artificial voice.

"Greetings, foreign scum! I, General Grievous, will receive your surrender!"

**0600 hrs**

**UNSC Super Star Destroyer/Mobile Command Base "Preston Cole"**

**Outer Rim Territories**

**Kamino**

Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood sat at the head of the briefing room table. Seated before him were members of AlCom. He checked the list to make sure all were present.

****Allied Powers High Command****

****Ranking Staff Personnel****

****Fleet Admiral Terrence Hood, UNSC****

****Fleet Admiral Adam DeWitt, UNSC****

****Admiral Bernard Montgomery, UNSC, Office of Naval Intelligence****

****Admiral Stanley Whitcomb, UNSC****

****General Vladimir Zyteslav, UNSC****

****General Edward Kits, UNSC****

****General Frank Cutler, UNSC****

****Grand Admiral Ackbar, New Republic****

****General Han Solo, New Republic****

****General Lando Calrissian, New Republic****

****General Jan Dodonna, New Republic****

****Commander Luke Skywalker, New Republic****

****Arbiter Orna 'Fulsamee, New Covenant****

****Fleet Master Muki 'Satumee, New Covenant****

****Fleet Master Seda 'Ortolee, New Covenant****

****Fleet Master Hans 'Gerratee, New Covenant****

****Field Master Qera 'Putamee, New Covenant****

****Field Master Tern 'Fahalee, New Covenant****

****Special Operations Commander Rtas 'Vadumee, New Covenant****

It seemed that everyone was here, except Skywalker and 'Satumee; they were partaking in the Concord Dawn Campaign.

"What are we here for, Admiral?" asked Han Solo.

Hood touched a button on the table near his seat, and a planetary system appeared. "We are here to attack and take the Imperial capital of Coruscant."

The room erupted into chaos as everyone asked questions at the same time. Hood sighed and raised his hands. They fell silent, except for Solo.

"You can't be serious," he said. "You're talking about an attack on Imperial Center! The most heavily defended planet in the galaxy! I'm all for a good fight, but this is suicide!"

"I agree," said Calrissian. "The Imperial Home Fleet is about five hundred ships. The entire planet is one big city, where hundreds of Imperial troops can hide."

"And that's not counting the two million stormtroopers on active duty all over the damn planet," added Solo.

The Arbiter clicked his mandibles. "Numbers do not mean anything, unless they are overwhelming. An attack by our fleet would decimate the enemy, as we are better trained than they are."

"Our losses would be heavy, too," said Admiral Whitcomb. "We wouldn't have enough strength to continue on to other Imperial strongholds, like Kuat."

General Cutler shook his head slowly. "There aren't enough troops to take the planet, in any case."

Field Master Qera 'Putamee growled. "If we cannot have the planet, no one can. I say we destroy the enemy fleet and bombard the planet with plasma."

"No," said Hood firmly. "Glassing Coruscant should be considered a last-ditch effort. I'm not willing to destroy the planet if there are innocent civilians that might be killed."

"Besides," said Admiral Montgomery, "we have to defeat the enemy fleet before we land our troops."

"No, really?" asked Solo in his best sarcastic voice.

Montgomery shot a glare at the former smuggler before continuing. "Section 3 has told me that work on the Indra super-nuclear missile is over, and the weapon is ready for use. The blast will wipe out at least half of the enemy fleet, damage another quarter, and possibly disable the planetary shields. The remaining ships can be dealt with easily, and we won't take heavy losses."

Hood sighed. "As much as I hate killing hundreds of people, whether soldier or civilian, this new missile presents the easiest option. And perhaps the destruction of their fleet might persuade their ground forces to surrender."

"Although I share the same sentiments," said Admiral Ackbar, "I agree that there is no other alternative which presents such little danger to our forces and guarantees victory at least in space."

Hood nodded. "Any objections?"

No one spoke.

"Then it's settled. We use the Indra."

Suddenly, an Ensign appeared in the doorway. He appeared nervous facing so many members of the brass. "Sir? We may have a big problem."

****A/N: Please tell me you love it. I'm sorry I didn't add Spartans vs. Mandalorians. It'll appear in the next chapter, I promise.****

10. Chapter 10: The Empire Strikes Back

****A/N** After a long hiatus, here is chapter ten of this thrilling saga. I had trouble finishing this in between SAT and HSPA studies, but I did, even though it is short. I will try to update more often.****_****

> _

**1200 hrs**

**New Covenant Cruiser "Golden Spear"**

**Task Force Sierra**

**Concord Dawn**

It had been six hours since command of the Allied fleet was handed over to Fleet Master Muki 'Satumee. Six hours since the Mandalorians fled before the Covenant onslaught. And in those six hours, the Imperial fleet had not moved.

Had it detected the humans' nuclear mines? wondered 'Satumee. Is it waiting for something?

Whatever it was, he decided not to move until the enemy moved first.

"Excellency," said the Grunt at communications, "Enemy calling us."

"Open a channel," said 'Satumee. Once again, the face of General Grievous filled the screen.

"_Afraid to attack, cowardly scum?"_

"I had been wishing," replied 'Satumee, "to ask of you the same question."

The general laughed. _"My fleet is too powerful, my ugly friend, for me to feel any fear. You, on the other hand, are pitiful."_

"If you are so powerful, why do you not attack?"

"_I want you to take a good long look at my fleet, and feel the despair and fear coursing through your veins."_

It was 'Satumee's turn to laugh. "The warriors of the Covenant do not feel fear. Attack, machine. Do not waste time with talk." He nodded to the Grunt, and the channel was closed.

"Energy surges," said the Sangheli at OPS. "The enemy is powering their weapons and engines."

"Tell the human commanders to ready their solid projectiles. I want a solution that has their fire hitting the enemy five seconds after the mines detonate."

A short pause. "It is done!"

"All ships, concentrate shield strength on the forward decks after we fire. Their first volley will be the most powerful. Ungoyy, has Allied Command sent word?"

"Yes, Excellency. They cannot help. They ask you to hold out until the mission on the planet is complete."

"I seeâ€|"

"Excellency, the _Jacob Keyes _sends word that its will join us shortly after it has dealt with a boarder."

"Very well."

"The enemy is within range of the mines."

On screen, the seven nuclear mines detonated, downing several shields

and damaging some ships. The human ships fired: deadly lines of smoldering metal streaked across space. The shots perforated the ships without shields, peppering their hulls with holes and flexing them out of shape. Several were destroyed or disabled. The rest, however, bounced off the Imperials' shields, and the ships shrugged off the damage.

"All ships, divert all power to shields," barked 'Satumee. The enemy fired, and hundreds of green bolts of energy strong enough to obliterate an entire village raced towards his fleet.

**1202 hrs**

**UNSC Super Destroyer "Jacob Keyes"**

**Task Force Victor**

**Concord Dawn**

Captain William Sherman watched impassively as the enemy shots hit the allied fleet dead on. The Covenant ships shrugged off the damage, but a UNSC destroyer and two medical frigates were destroyed. Clouds of vaporized Titanium-A and battle-plate floated through space, impacting on friendly ships and causing their shields to flare fiercely.

"He's breaking through!" screamed a crewman. He and three other Navy guards in maroon uniforms watched as the Mandalorian slowly but steadily burned his way through. They clutched M7 Submachine guns.

Sherman slowly pulled his new M6E pistol from its holster. The 'E' variant had a longer barrel, had the D's power and zoom feature, and the C variant's rapid rate of fire. With deliberate aim, the Captain pointed the pistol at the white-hot and sputtering door.

Boom.

The Mandalorian burst through in a shower of sparks. He ducked under one guard's fire, causing it to hit the other guard who died immediately. A vibro-blade to the throat killed another guard and a single blaster bolt in the middle of the forehead neutralized the last. But the warrior made a fatal mistake: he ignored the Captain.

Sherman fired. The first round hit the warrior's helmet, denting the Mandalorian iron and rocking the enemy back on his heels and against the wall. The second round shattered the T-shaped visor, allowing Sherman a brief glimpse of the man's clear blue eyes. The third round flew right through the shattered visor, and a fountain of blood obscured the face forever. The warrior crumpled to the floor, dead. Blood flowed from the shattered helmet, and dripped on the floor.

Sherman flicked the safety back on and holstered the pistol. He noticed his hands were shaking; that had been too close for comfort. The image of the man's eyes haunted him.

He shook his head to clear it and controlled the shaking. He had a

job to do. He also had to set an example for his crew.

The crew, after one final glance at the body, went back to work, their faces pale.

"Incoming!" screamed a crewman.

Sherman looked at the TAC display. The Imperial ships had fired again. Green bolts of energy flew straight towards them, going slower than usual. Sherman knew what that meant; the bolts were high powered, strong enough to down even his shields and destroy lighter ships.

The deep voice of Fleet Master Muki 'Satumee crackled over the COM. _"All ships, break ranks and engage individual targets. Concentrate on the enemy frigates and then release your fighters. All Seraph craft, engage targets Alpha and Delta. All Longswords, attack targets Beta and Gamma." _

Sherman looked at the helmsman. "Do it. Evasive maneuvers."

The allied fleet scattered. Most avoided the full force of the attack, but a Covenant cruiser, a destroyer, a minesweeper and a human frigate were destroyed.

The remaining ships sped towards the enemy fleet. Fleet Master 'Satumee made sure no ship went into the center of the enemy formation, where they could be easily boarded. Instead, he ordered the ships to enter the formation in such a way that the Imperials couldn't fire all their batteries without hitting their own ships.

Both fleets opened fire. Covenant and Imperial ships engaged in broadside exchanges of fire. UNSC vessels fired MAC rounds, punching through downed shields and downing many others. Clouds of plasma torpedoes, Archer missiles and concussion missiles impacted on hulls and shields. Swarms of Seraphs, Longswords, Lance Interceptors and TIE fighters of every designation engaged in dogfights and strafing runs. One ship, the _UNSC Ghazni_, one fire and in danger of imminent destruction, crashed head on with an Imperial Tector-class Star Destroyer. The superstructures of both ships locked together, and both opened fire at point-blank range. They were engulfed in a nuclear ball of destruction, and both ships faded off the tactical display.

The Fleet Master's plan was sound. With the Allied fleet in the midst of their own fleet, all of the five hundred plus Imperial ships couldn't all have a go at the Allies at the same time. They had to wait until one of their own was destroyed to take its place. That, or charge in and risk crashing into their own ships.

Eventually, however, the Imperials' superior numbers would come in on top. They would recover, regroup and destroy any remaining Allied ships. Sherman knew this battle couldn't be won. They had to hold out until Spartan-117 completed his mission.

Sherman hoped that he'd live long enough to see the fall of the Empire.

**1215 hrs**

**Spartan Blue Team**

"_**Argonaut" Elite Task Force**_

**Concord Dawn**

Lieutenant John-117 fired a sustained burst from his MA5C. The Mandalorian warrior staggered as 7.62 mm rounds slammed into him, puncturing his armor and hitting something vital. The man crumpled to the ground, dead.

It wasn't looking good. It had all gone according to plan, until the main Mandalorian force arrived, completely unnoticed by scans from space. The Lieutenant was forced to call in the ODSF reinforcements, and the battle had become one of attrition. That is, until the Jedi arrived. John had only seen Skywalker in action before, but never the rest of the new Jedi Order. They were magnificent. The bars of light they wielded were much more graceful than a Covenant energy sword's hacking and lunging. They blocked blaster bolts easily, sending them off into the air harmlessly or even back at the sender.

Not that they weren't invincible. Several Jedi lay dead on the ground, overwhelmed by superior numbers.

John emptied his last clip into a speeder-borne Mandalorian, careful to give the fast vehicle a good lead. AP rounds peppered the machine, and it exploded. He discarded the rifle and picked up a lightsaber lying on the ground. It ignited with a golden blade. He paused to admire the weapon for two seconds, and then charged.

Time seemed to slow down for the Lieutenant as blaster bolts of every color flew his way. He evaded some of the shots and even managed to block others. He expertly swung the weapon at the closest enemy. The blade sliced through the Mandalorian's neck seal like air, and the head fell to the ground closely followed by the body. He ducked under the blow of another Mandalorian with a vibro-blade and stabbed. The blade killed the man instantly. Another warrior fired at him from beyond his range, flying with his jetpack. Suddenly, a thin trail of vapor connected the warrior's head, and the man crashed. John gave his silent thanks to Linda and her team.

He charged up an incline to survey the battle. It seemed that neither side had gained an advantage. As he watched, a group of Sharquoi Elites climbed on top of an enemy tank, sliced it open with energy swords, and threw plasma grenades inside. As they jumped off, the tank shuddered with blue-white explosions, smoldered and ground to a halt. A Mandalorian warrior broke an ODSF's neck while shooting with expert precision at others, getting at least four headshots. John picked up a discarded Sniper rifle off a dead Marine, noting he was a Spartan-I and briefly thought what happened to Sergeant Johnson, and took aim. The APFSDS round punctured the helmet, and the warrior was down.

A warning pulsed as the Lieutenant took fire from behind him. He dropped the sniper, activated the lightsaber and threw it. The blade sank into the man's chest, and he fell. There were fierce shouts, and John looked up as the Marine 205th Division charged into the battle. A Warthog mounted Gauss cannon thundered and sent high-velocity rounds into a light tank, and around two hundred Marines stormed a

hill held by Mandalorian snipers. John recognized one; a dark Marine with glasses. His name was Don Narively, and the last time he had seen the corporal was on a boarding action near Earth. His IFF tag showed he had been promoted to Staff Sergeant, and by the way he led his squad away from the hill he realized that there was no way the Marines could advance against it with out air support.

The Lieutenant spotted two Scorpion MBTs. He patched through to the tank commanders.

"Fire on Hill 14, now!"

"_Affirmative," _came the reply. The large barrels swiveled, aimed, and fired. The top of Hill 14 exploded in a shower of dirt and metal. When the smoke cleared, there were only three Mandalorians left, still dazed by the blast. The Marines then charged again, and Hill 14 was firmly in UNSC hands. From the top of the hill, the Marine and Argonaut snipers had a commanding view of the battlefield. Perhaps realizing this, the Mandalorians retreated, laying down sheets of covering fire to protect their retreat.

John was about to order his air units to pursue, when his COM crackled and the static-filled voice of Captain William Scott buzzed in his ear.

"_Lieutenant, reform your men and get ready for emergency evac."_

"We were just making progress down here sir."

"_Yeah, well it's the apocalypse up here. Get ready for evac in one hour. Scott out."_

John understood one thing from the transmission; the action above the planet was getting ugly. He tore his attention away from the larger picture and proceeded to order a retreat.

For better or worse, this battle was over.

**1230 hrs**

**Imperial Star Destroyer "Aggressor"**

**Second Fleet of the Galactic Empire**

**Concord Dawn**

Captain Sagaro Omin wished he had quit the Navy after the Clone Wars. He had no desire to serve a republic that had transformed into an Empire, but as long as his father remained alive, he was to stay where he was.

What galled him right now, however, was serving under the creature responsible for so much destruction during the Clone Wars: General Grievous. The monster had chosen Omin's ship to be his flagship during the battle, and there was nothing the Captain could do about it.

To drive away his disgust at the situation, he concentrated on the battle. There really was no need to; the enemy's remaining seven

ships were in full retreat. Dropships from the planet's surface scuttled inside a cruiser as they attempted to flee. Omin, however, wanted to capture a ship for the Empire. He spotted a destroyer with red war stripes painted on the side. That would do.

"Helm, accelerate to maximum speed. Get us within tractor beam range of that destroyer."

The enormous craft slowly accelerated towards the tiny ship. Turbo laser batteries fired at the destroyer's engines, trying to slow it down. The vessel finally slowed down, and the Aggressor settled over it. Large robotic arms grabbed the UNSC ship. Arc cutters sputtered and sparked, Titanium-A hull was breached, and one thousand stormtroopers engaged three hundred Marines and Navy soldiers in brutal close quarters combat. Not one soldier from either side sued for mercy, and none was dispensed.

Until Grievous joined in the fighting.

The hulking cyborg had lost all of his trophy lightsabers to Vader after Kenobi had defeated him. But the Emperor had given him new weapons: two double-bladed lightsabers and two normal ones. He was a whirlwind of green, blue and red arcs of deadly energy. Marines and Naval personnel were cut to pieces. Bullets flew in the monster's direction, but not even one reached him. Finally, the few remaining UNSC personnel surrendered. General Grievous stood victorious over the bodies of his enemies, letting out a cackle that chilled one's spine.

A stormtrooper walked up to him. "General, we have captured the enemy captain."

Grievous stared down at the prisoner, whose hands were in binders. Captain Miranda Keyes stared back into his cold yellow eyes, unwilling to back down, yet fear had drained all the color from her face.

"You are now my prisoner," said Grievous. "I have been ordered to keep you alive, as Vader thinks you are somehow important. But, the rest of these prisoners" he said, gesturing to Keyes' command crew, "are not." He ignited one of his lightsabers.

"No!" screamed Keyes—but before she had even finished, the cyborg had killed her crew.

One of Grievous' taloned feet latched onto a dead man's head and crushed it. "Take her away!"

Keyes, with tears flowing freely down her face, was dragged away.

0900 hrs

BBC Galactic News

United Earth Government Territories

****Breaking News!****

Yesterday, the Allied Expeditionary Force suffered a serious defeat

at Concord Dawn at the hands of the Imperial Navy. Only six UNSC ships made it out alive. One UNSC destroyer, the Iroquois, has been captured, a fact ONI has confirmed. No Covenant ships returned.

"We had the battle won," said a Naval officer who wished to remain anonymous. "The Mandalorian fleet was decimated; their ground forces were in full retreat; it should've been a clear UNSC victory. Then the Imperials showed up in force. We had no idea they had that many ships to field."

Fleet Admiral Sir Terrence Hood said today: "This is a serious matter, and we are taking steps to counter it. As for the Mandalorians, I think it's safe to say they won't be much of a threat again."

The representative of the Covenant High Council said today: "We mourn those who have left us to walk the path. But do not forget that they died as warriors with their face to the foe, and they took their honor with them into the afterlife."

Senator Mon Mothma of the New Republic said today: "We grieve for those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom and theirs. I can only hope that their sacrifice will not be forgotten."

** press enter to continue **

11. Side stories 1

A/N: sorry for the short update. I'll submit these small stories for you enjoyment until I finish the next chapter.

Side Stories: Boarding the Iroquois

-A short story from the POV of a storm trooper

It all started when they caught me breaking in the penthouse of some rich senator on Coruscant, my home. I was eighteen at the time. They saw that I was adventurous, and instead of beating the poodoo out of me, they offered to let me in the Storm Trooper Corps. "You can see the galaxy," they said, "From one corner of the Empire to the other."

Naturally, I took the chance with open arms.

I don't know how, but I stayed alive for ten years. I made friends with a trooper named Zakk. He'd been forced into service after the Imperials killed his father. He was a decent fellow. I preferred his company to that of the clones.

I reckon I did a lot of things I wasn't proud of. For one, I killed a group of rebels by releasing poison gas into the air, as per my CO's orders. The entire planet was infected, around a million people died. But that was what it was all about, right? Eliminate the enemies of the Empire: the battle cry of the Imperial Army. If I didn't live up to that, what was I?

I heard Zakk was killed when the Tantive IV was boarded. Princess Leia blasted him in the face. What a way to end a friendship.

When this new war came around, my battalion was ordered to board an enemy destroyer. My Sergeant ordered me to be the first one on board. That wasn't good. It was a known fact: first man in is the first man dead. As the arc cutters sparked, that was all I could think of.

The doors open. I charge in fast and low. I'm still alive! As I blast a Marine, I look behind me in time to see Sarge get a facefull of bullets.

Tough luck, Sarge. I was the first one in, and I'm still alive.

Plenty of Marines to shoot here. You can tell they're desperate. General Grievous joins the fun with his lightsabers. I don't know why he's here, but I know one thing: the Empire always had difficulty distinguishing between its heroes and its monsters.

My squad makes it to the bridge. The good General has ordered us to take the Captain alive. I see movement. "Set for stun," I said.

Then the most beautiful captain I've ever seen turns the corner and blasts me in the face

Cold. Not supposed to be cold inside a ship.

I hear my squad mates stun her and her companions. "They'll be alright," one says.

They'll be alright.

I won't.

12. Chapter 11: Vader's Fist Strikes

**A/N: No one really received my side story with much enthusiasm, so I'm going back to the main story line. I hope it isn't stupid. Also, when people don't like my story and email me to tell me so (well, most emails I get are good) I want them to critique it in an educated manner, not like, "OMFG d00d ur fic sux like ur mom lamo lol lol". I will not tolerate it. **

**1200 hrs**

UNSC Super Destroyer/Mobile Allied Command Base "Preston Cole"

**Allied Expeditionary Fleet **

**Muster Point Gamma**

**Felucia**

**Two days later**

Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood sat at the head of the conference table. All of the brass of AlCom sat at the table, too. Well, nearly all; Fleet Master Muki 'Satumee's chair was empty, and it would stay that way until a suitable replacement could be found.

The crisis atmosphere was unmistakable. No one said anything, but the silence spoke volumes. Special Operations Commander Rtas 'Vadumee rubbed the stubs of his missing mandibles, undoubtedly thinking about the loss of so many of his Sharquoi. Admiral Montgomery looked like the deaths of so many Spartan-Is and IVs weighed on him terribly; he sat hunched in his chair. And Hood needed to think of something to counter the Imperial advance. They had already retaken Mygeeto, and were getting closer to Kamino—which couldn't happen. The next batch of Spartan-IVs, this time numbering ten thousand, were currently being cloned and grown from SPARTAN-117's DNA. They needed two more weeks to be ready for combat, time that Hood would literally have to fight for.

Every single ship they had had been ordered to rallying point Gamma. Every ship had come, and now they numbered three hundred and forty strong. The Arbiter had said one hundred more Covenant ships were on their way. The UNSC, however, had sent only the new super carrier Aegean and the destroyers Leonidas and Artaphernes. Rebellion, no doubt stirred up by Imperial agents, was posing a serious threat, important enough that Fleet Admiral Harper had taken control of anti-insurgent activities. ONI was being spread thin trying to gain intel on the Imperials, develop new technologies, and weeding out Imperial agents at home.

Hood cleared his throat. "Well, gentlemen, the Imperial Fleet is on its way to Kamino. They want to make a stop-over here to destroy us. Any ideas on what to do?"

"We've learned how to operate the planet's Hyper-velocity Guns," said Admiral Montgomery. "They're similar to our MAC guns—which makes me think they've stolen some of our tech." He scowled, then continued. "However, they're all powered by a single underground generator. Imperial top planning again. This generator and the guns themselves are vulnerable to ground attacks, which makes them a priority to protect."

"We don't have enough troops to guard all of the guns," said Han Solo, "but we can protect the generators. We have more than enough clone troopers to do that. The Marines and Covenant should probably try to prevent Imperial air strikes. But if the Imperials want to execute a Base-Delta-Zero, there's not much they can do."

Hood scowled. A Base-Delta-Zero was the Imperial code for orbital bombardment.

"Until then," said General Kits, "we'll let the Marines do their work. The 205th Marines will guard the generator along with the main New Republic force. Now, the only place the Imperials can land is here"—he pointed to a spot on the map seven miles west from the generator—"That's if they want to land their ATATs, which they most probably will. Alpha Company will hold position here in this valley. It's the only direct route to the generator complex. India Company will stay at the valley's exit and secure A-Company's fallback point. The rest of the 205th will set up defenses around the generator. The generator complex is so huge; the entire 133rd, 77th, and 5th Republic Legions will fit inside. The 133rd's ImprocCo Company's armored division will back up the rest of the 205th's generator defenses. God knows we'll need those ATTEs when the enemy walkers get through."

"If they don't land their walkers," said General Cutler, "Alpha and India should be able to hold them off for quite a bit. If they do, they can outrun them. In any case, the 105th Helljumpers' Echo and Foxtrot Companies will be deployed north of the Imperial LZ with Scorpions and M45 mortars. If this works out, the Imperials will retreat south-southwest straight into the rest of the 105th."

"I will assign seven Venator cruisers to stay in low orbit and prevent the Imperial Navy from bombarding the generator and our armies," said Admiral Ackbar.

"What about the Spartans?" asked Solo.

"They've been sent on a mission to Kuat shipyards," said Montgomery. "They're gonna blow the docks to pieces and rendezvous with _Point of No Return_ afterwards."

Solo snorted. "Typical suicide mission."

"Oh, they'll make it out alive," said Hood. "Even if they don't, they'll take Kuat Shipyards with them."

"I bet they will."

The holotank crackled to life, and a UNSC captain appeared. "_Slipspace monitors have detected a large mass incoming, sir. Profile match with known Imperial ships. We estimate over five hundred craft. ETA four hours."_"

"Are the mine fields in place, captain?" asked Hood.

"_Yes sir. We're getting active signals from all the Hornet mines."_"

"Alert all ships: stand by to engage enemy vessels." Hood turned to the rest of his staff. "You'd best go to your individual ships. Godspeed."

**2200 hrs**

**Spartan Blue Team**

**En Route to Kuat Shipyards**

Lieutenant SPARTAN John-117 and his team sat inside the cramped Imperial Sentinel-class troop transport. A Rebel pilot who had once been an Imperial, Hobbie Klivian, was flying. The transport slid smoothly into a huge convoy of Imperial ships of all sizes, from small TIE fighters to Imperial-Class Star Destroyers and a huge Executor-Class Super Star Destroyer or Star Dreadnought.

Every single capital ship was under construction. Their skeletal hulls were being pulled by massive tugs with tractor beams. Droids in jet-packs zoomed around, welding armor plates and installing components. The convoy was like a vehicle assembly line—times one thousand.

The commandeered transport zoomed smoothly into a landing pad inside a large docking structure which seemed to be coordinating the operations. The durasteel hull pinged and groaned slightly as gravity

settled the ship, which finally landed with a muffled thud.

"_It looks clear,"_ said Klivian. _"I'm dropping the ramp now. Good luck. May the Force be with you."_

"Roger that," said the Lieutenant. "Blue Team, activate your active camo. Hobbie thinks it looks clear, but I'm not taking any chances."

John's suspicion was soon verified. Four stormtroopers walked towards the vessel, blasters held casually. They didn't notice that the deck appeared slightly warped. One did, however, and when he turned to look, the phenomena had passed. Blue Team had passed them, and John saw the trooper remove his helmet and shake it.

"Notice anything unusual, Cortana?" asked John.

"Aside from there being a thousand ships and innumerable troops around here? Nothing." The AI paused. "What happened to the other AI you had? Prometheus?"

John suppressed a chuckle. "He found my exploits to beâ€|too exciting."

"An inadequate understatement. That's not like him."

"I had a feeling he wanted to say more, but apparently he kept it to himself." John continued down a corridor that seemed to lead right into the middle of the facility. The NAV marker indicating the position of the station's reactors said he had one kilometer to go. His camo meter, however, only had another minute left before it needed a recharge. He turned a cornerâ€|and found himself face-to-face with a Darktrooper.

Before he fired, Cortana said, "Stop! Those suits are empty!"

She was right. Row after row of matte-black suits lined the corridor. On the other side, Imperial soldiers in skin-tight black suits slept on bunks. They seemed to be more built than the average trooper. It seemed that they had entered a barracks.

"Not much privacy," remarked Cortana.

"Let's move," said the Lieutenant. They were too close to the sleeping soldiers, and if one woke up for one reason or another, Blue Team would be seen, active camo or not.

It was when they had only four meters to go when it happened. Perhaps it was bad timing, or maybe coincidence. It didn't matter; the results were the same. John's camo faded out, Will's boot knocked down a canteen and a trooper suddenly decided he needed to wake up. For a few seconds, four Spartans and fifty Imperial Darktroopers stared at each other. This was followed by the clicking of several blasters with their safeties turned off. Then all hell broke loose.

**2200 hrs**

**_Alpha Company Defensive Position
Beta_**

Felucia****

Lieutenant Tom Price looked through the powerful monocular towards the end of the valley. Imperial landing craft had been dropping off troops for the last half hour, and the Lieutenant was sure he had seen four ATAT barges land as well. He scowled. His company was armed with M19 and M21 launchers, enough for taking on ATSTs, 2M tanks, Saber tanks and even Juggernauts, but he doubted even the heavy Warthog-mounted Gauss cannons could dent the armor of an Imperial walker.

Half a klick behind him, the NRA (New Republic Army) ATTEs were lying in wait to ambush the ATATs that would inevitably get through. Hidden behind a large outcropping of rock was A-Company's getaway: a fleet of Warthogs ready to roll.

His COM buzzed, and Price recognized the voice of the Company's best sniper, Corporal McKay. **_**"Enemy incoming," **_** she hissed from her position at the top of the valley.

Price relayed the information to his XO, Master Sergeant Peyton. "Saber tanks, two squads of four; 2Ms, two squads of four; ATSTs, four squads of four; TIE Maulers, five squads of five; ATATs, four of them; infantry—two hundred, plus another two hundred in reserve."

"Jesus," said Sergeant Peyton. "They'll roll us under."

Price shook his head. "Not necessarily. Move the rocket jockeys forward. They're to target those Maulers before they arrive and do a fucking kamikaze. Then target any other armored vehicle that comes through—**_**with rockets and Gauss cannons only**_**—and save the lotus mines for the ATATs."

"You know, sir, those mines won't do much to an ATAT."

"They'll slow 'em down long enough to make our getaway." Price checked a map. "Have you heard anything from the 105th? Echo and Foxtrot?"

"Negative, sir. We have no idea whether they're in position or not."

"Great. Put Jameson and Walker on gunner."

"Walker's dead. Killed when the Imperials landed. He decided to place a few more mines and got sniped."

"Alright, Narively then." Price jumped into the forward trench where the rocket jockeys had set up shop and sighted the far end of the valley where the Imperials would come from. He could see the TIE Maulers already, advancing in a charge Napoleon would recognize. "Looks like infantry's right behind them." He increased the zoom and saw blue markings on the glove of one trooper. "Damn. Looks like Vader's 501st Legion's here."

"What makes them so special," said a Private.

"They're the best of the Imperial Army. Almost never defeated in

combat. And we'll be fighting them. How does that make you feel, Private?"

"Scared. What about you, sir?"

Price yanked the lever on his MA5C. "Makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside."

As soon as the Maulers were in range, they were greeted by a volley of rockets. Most exploded on the spot. Others trundled determinately onwards before being destroyed.

The 501st halted. Some took cover behind the remnants of the tanks, while others hid behind the clouds of smoke. Price couldn't make out exactly what they were doing, but he was sure he didn't like it.

What they were doing soon became apparent as rapid-fire blaster bolts the length of the Lieutenant's arm flew in his direction. "TAKE COVER! TAKE COVER!"

The frantic order came too late for four Marines, and Price watched in disbelief as the Imperial Heavy Repeating Blasters cut them down. The enemy was using stutter fire, not letting their blasters overheat, but at the same time preventing Price and his men from so much as peaking over the trench. The Lieutenant could hear the heavy LAAG guns answer in kind, but the range was too great. Price realized the stationary machine gun turrets were the only thing preventing the 501st from storming the trenches.

The private Price had spoken to earlier crawled over. "We're getting massacred, sir," he shouted over the gunfire and explosions. "We should fall back!"

"I know!" Price shouted back. "Everybody get ready. Wait for my signal." Price paused. "Covering fire!"

The remaining sixteen Marines, including Price, peeked out over the trench and fired. Sheets of AP rounds ripped through advancing ranks of stormtroopers. The wave of attackers slowed their charge, and the Marine gunners punished them severely for it. Price and his men jumped out of the trench and fell back behind the gunners, behind a barrier of sandbags and instacrete. Five more Marines fell as the 501st resumed their charge, and a gunner was taken out of action, as was the pile of slag that used to be a turret.

A thunderous explosion shattered the air and made the Lieutenant's teeth rattle. The Asteroidia anti-personnel mines had detonated, and the enemy fire slowed. Price used his monocular, and saw the surviving Imperials falling back to regroup behind a wall of ATSTs and fighter tanks. Beyond this staging area, Price could see the outlines of the monstrous ATAT walkers emerging from the smoke of the lotus mines, almost entirely unscathed, like Titans in the mythical war of the Greek gods.

The fight was far from over, and Price steeled himself for the assault.

End

file.